

The Music of Mary and Martha:
Tension and Dissonance in Marguerite de Navarre's *Chansons spirituelles*

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Views of “Selfhood”	7
Chapter Descriptions.....	14
Chapter 1 – Theological Tensions	21
Introduction.....	21
Dealing with Sin	22
Foundations.....	24
Localization.....	30
Sighs and Murmurs	34
From Murmuring and Sighing to Crying Out	47
Speaking Out and Staying Silent – <i>Sola Scriptura</i>	53
Authority	61
Challenges to Authority	66
Conclusion	74
Chapter Two – Gender Tensions	75
Introduction.....	75
Towards a Definition of “Feminism” in the <i>Chansons spirituelles</i>	76
Misogynous Theology and the Status of Women in the Renaissance.....	79
Religious Writing by Women	86
Feminism in Marguerite’s Other Writings.....	90
A Female Voice in the <i>Chansons spirituelles</i>	92
The Benefits of Femininity	103
The Virgin Mary in the <i>Chansons spirituelles</i>	109
Conclusion	113
Chapter Three – Poetic and Rhetorical Tensions.....	116
Introduction.....	116
<i>Chansons spirituelles</i> and Evangelical Self-hood.....	117
Using Poetry to Negotiate Spiritual Tension	121
Self-dialogue and Introspection	131
Landscapes and the Self.....	143
Conclusion	162

Chapter Four – Violent Tensions.....	164
Introduction.....	164
Violence and Religion.....	166
Violence in Marguerite’s Other Work	171
Violence in the <i>Chansons spirituelles</i>	174
Violence and Sincerity	176
Violence and Identity	192
Conclusion	200
Conclusion	203
Bibliography	209
Primary Sources	209
Secondary Sources	210

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Introduction

In August of 1555, Jeanne d'Albret recorded an incident from her childhood in which her mother, Marguerite de Navarre was praying. Referring to an evening sometime between 1534 and 1536, the twenty-seven year old recalled that she had observed her mother in the company of two of her spiritual advisors at one of the family homes. Francis I had exiled Noel Bédard, self-styled protector of the pure faith and spokesperson for the faculty of theology at the Sorbonne, in 1533. This freed evangelical expression throughout the kingdom, and the king's sister, Marguerite de Navarre, was among those who took advantage of the opportunity to promote the message that was so fond to her heart and to those around her. The *affaire des placards* in October, 1534, however, caused the king to recoil from his previous support of the evangelical innovators. Having left the court in Paris upon the request of her brother, Marguerite found herself in the Midi. Apparently the Queen of Navarre was also discussing religious matters with her company (which most likely included Gérard Roussel and one other). On this particular evening, Henri d'Albret, her husband at that time and father of her daughter, stormed into the room where the meeting was taking place. According to Jeanne's recollection, Henri was "greatly annoyed" at the discussion and especially at the audacity of his wife to engage so openly and eagerly in matters of theology. So perturbed he was that he "slapped her on the cheek and forbade her to meddle in doctrinal matters" (Roelker 15).¹ Furthermore, the enraged father turned to his young daughter, shook a stick at her and threatened her so firmly that the older Jeanne reported that she had remained in tearful obedience to her father's command for the rest of her days.²

¹ Roelker quotes here from Jeanne d'Albret's letter to the Vicomte de Gourdon. B.N. F fr 17,044, fol. 446 (Collection Vallant).

² This is not altogether true since Jeanne did convert to Protestantism.

Happily, Marguerite de Navarre did not heed her husband in this case, and she continued to write prolifically on religious matters with a fervor that only increased as she neared the end of her life. Thanks to her published writings, along with other sources, we have learned much about evangelical thinking and the role of women in Renaissance France. Her most famous work, the *Heptaméron* (published posthumously in 1558 and 1559), with its rich tapestry of stories, anecdotes and discussions, caught the attention of contemporaries and continues to inspire and intrigue critics. In his critical edition, for example, Michel François concludes his presentation of the work by noting that “la pensée antique et la doctrine chrétienne se complètent-elles pour composer ce tout harmonieux qui constitue l’essentiel de la philosophie de la reine” (xv). The *Heptaméron* provides a worldly context in which to apply evangelical and classical ideas concerning grace and love as the *devisants* take turns giving examples and counter examples of their understandings of these notions. Marguerite, like many in the Renaissance, had a penchant for melding seemingly incompatible arguments or positions to create a bifurcated, paradoxical view on many issues.

Literature Review

Though scholars continue to mine the *Heptaméron* for its seemingly inexhaustible supply of interesting studies, Marguerite’s poetry has received much less critical attention and largely remains, as Robert Cottrell termed it in 1986 in his influential *The Grammar of Silence*, “a *terra incognita*” for many reasons, not the least of which is the linguistic complexity with which the author would efface herself from her work (ix). Despite the fact that the writing of novellas is actually an anomaly in the literary production of the Queen of Navarre, who was known in her lifetime more as a poet and dramaturge, there are relatively few studies (but growing in number) dedicated to her devotional poetry, and even fewer focusing on her *Chansons spirituelles* in

particular. Cottrell and others have added significantly to our understanding of this multifaceted collection of poems, yet there are still many questions to be explored. In fact, one can wonder whether to call this assemblage a collection or “work” at all given its publication history. At the age of fifty-five, Marguerite had Jean de Tournes publish *Les Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses* in 1547, to which she appended thirty-two of the forty-seven songs found in modern editions.³ The public at large gained access to the remaining fifteen songs for the first time in 1896 when Abel Lefranc, one of the Queen’s biographers and editors, published her *Dernières Œuvres*. The term “compilation” seems more appropriate to this diverse bundling of devotional poetry.

Yet there do seem to be certain threads running through the poems that unify them. In one of the foundational studies of Marguerite’s devotional writing, Robert Cottrell established a Mary versus Martha paradigm that he says characterizes the Queen’s spiritual poetry, including the *Chansons spirituelles* (*Grammar* 311). There is, according to Cottrell, a tendency in these poems to elevate the contemplative life, as illustrated by the image of Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to His teaching in the Gospel of Luke. This life contrasts with the *vita activa* characterized by the activity of Mary’s busy sister, Martha, who worked feverishly to prepare for the Lord’s physical needs. In the story, Christ gently rebukes Martha who accuses her sister of laziness, reminding Martha that Mary has chosen the better part. These two modes of being infuse nearly every poem in the compilation and inspired the title of the current project. In a sense, the two sisters are one flesh since they are products of the same union, yet they have such differing and complementary outlooks on what is real and necessary. The tension in this household must have been constant as Mary and Martha each struggled to impose her will on the

³ Both Georges Dottin and Michèle Clément count forty-seven *chansons* plus various other poems. All references to the *Chansons spirituelles* in this project come from the Clément edition, unless otherwise noted.

other and each one's perspective completing what was missing from the other's. For Cottrell, Marguerite's poems try to balance these two views of life and present the Word of God as "both transcendent and immanent." The Queen's poems "end up embodying and signifying the *unio*" with Christ as her soul merged with the absolute perfection of the *Logos* and results in a self-effacement as she allowed the Scriptures to speak for themselves through her poetry (*Grammar* 312).

Paula Sommers continued a similar vein of investigation in Marguerite's spiritual poetry in her *Celestial Ladders*. She saw the poems as a simplification of medieval theologians and mystics who tended to visualize spiritual ascension as parallel series of steps (sometimes up to seven), whereas Marguerite prefers the simple progression of *purgatio*, *illuminatio*, *perfectio* (11-12). These steps are performed in various places in her poetry as "[...] Marguerite creates a lyrical persona whose intimate dialogues with God lead the reader into the text" (13). We see here some of the earliest intimations of Marguerite's constant struggle with authority and voice as she battles with submitting herself silently to the *Verbum*. Sommers went on to note that in one of her longer devotional poems, Marguerite goes so far as to oppose "rational thought, planning, and initiative to inaction, silence, and emotional conflict," and she creates a tension between "the deepest intuitive faculties of the soul and the limited expressivity of human language" (25-26). Sommers turned the inaction, silence and internal conflict that Cottrell pointed out in *The Grammar of Silence* into the seminal essence of rational thought, planning and initiative that result in a text. She pointed out that Marguerite struggles with language (as the quintessential expression of reason and structure) in an effort to erase herself as Cottrell claims she did. However, Sommers did not conclude that Marguerite is a "silent" poet but one who speaks with a highly structured, well-reasoned and thought-provoking voice. The authority the

Queen of Navarre wishes to exert over her literary creation could only be wielded through the masterful use of the language she so longed to avoid. As she uses words to create images of immobility, death and imprisonment, she creates a world that moves, lives and is free. The presence of her own voice, however, reveals that the price she paid was, to some extent, ownership of what she has engendered.

Finally, Sommers mentioned the development of gender identity in Marguerite's poems. In the early poems, there is a heavy feminine presence, followed by a transition away from solely feminine guides to a group of guides – both male and female. Marguerite ultimately subordinates both sexes to God (108). She presents a “mystical union [that] occurs between *Tout* [God] and *Rien* [the sinner] and the choice of such abstract vocabulary deliberately transcends any concept of generic identity. The designated ‘target’ for Marguerite's spiritual trajectory is absolute freedom, and that freedom implies freedom from carnal instincts and appetites, from language, sexuality, the body and the self” (109).

The next major undertaking regarding Marguerite's spiritual poems appeared in Gary Ferguson's *Mirroring Belief* in 1992. Ferguson was primarily concerned with re-examining “Marguerite's poems and the religious belief they mirror” through an epistemological and linguistic study (x). Accordingly, he presented the work of contemporary and preceding devotional writers in order to establish the context in which Marguerite was composing her poems and distinguished between theological language and mystical language in her poetry. This distinction allowed for a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of the Queen's work as the poet mixes and switches codes regularly throughout her devotional writing. Knowing which code she is using allows the reader to properly understand what she is trying to communicate. Ferguson's analysis moved from considering the theological question of justification in the

sixteenth century to presenting “the tension between the spiritual and attitudinal ontology of the praying soul as it stands naked before its Creator over against the theological structures of the self in history and the self in the Church” within these poems (9). He concluded by noting the gradually increasing influence of evangelical ideas in Marguerite’s poems, demonstrating that “Marguerite’s religion is balanced and considered, never haphazard or vague: throughout her life she remains open both to the traditions she inherits and to the ideas of the great thinkers and innovators of her day” (232).

Other shorter, still influential and important studies have also enriched our knowledge of the intricacy and significance of the songs. For example, Ehsan Ahmed elucidated the poetic uneasiness that characterizes many of the *Chansons spirituelles*. He argued, on the one hand, that Marguerite’s poetic identity “is precariously positioned between self-affirmation and self-effacement” (“Poet’s Passion” 39). He followed Cottrell’s Mary/Martha model in order to evidence a clear negation of the self in the Queen’s poetry, what he termed an evangelical experience and writing of death. While I agree with much of Ahmed’s analysis, I do hope to demonstrate that he did not give sufficient place to Marguerite’s own continuing voice in the poems that speak of death and suffering.

Edwin Duval, on the other hand, maintained that the songs actually foreground Marguerite’s own voice as the lyrical subject. He concluded that Marguerite’s poetic persona does not tend towards silence, but rather towards singing as the fullest expression of one’s being filled with God’s Spirit (570). Duval stressed the importance of the “souffle de l’Esprit de Dieu” as one of the unifying principles of the Queen’s poetry (562). I return to these vocalized effects of God’s Spirit upon the believer in my first chapter in order to determine when and why Marguerite writes silence and when she chooses to enunciate (with or without words) her own

voice. This development of Marguerite's lyrical voice and the resulting struggle with self-awareness make the *Chansons spirituelles* an ideal testing ground for examining the Queen's perspective(s) on interiority and the relationship between her interior self and the exterior world.

More recently, speaking to this idea of dialogue between inner and outer, Rosanna Gorris Camos commented that "ce for intérieur est loin, chez Marguerite, d'être un havre de paix: il reste un lieu où luttent en secret les lumières et les ombres, notre force et notre fragilité" ("Voler" 51). Though much of Gorris Camos's article deals with the *Heptaméron*, these comments concern the Queen's spiritual poetry that I analyze here. It is precisely these moments of conflict that yield the most interesting insights into Marguerite's own consciousness of the self as permeable, porous and unpredictable.

Views of "Selfhood"

We have no record of Marguerite sharing these inner struggles with an audience until at least 1530 during private and public presentations of her poems, and, as noted above, it was not for another seventeen years later that she would have the first of the poems published. Yet, by including her name on the poems (as opposed to the original anonymous publication of the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* in 1531) and having them published by the illustrious Jean de Tournes of Lyon, presumably for wide distribution, she obviously intended for her work to be read. Thus, there is an element of public instruction that would indicate a desire to speak for herself and to be heard.

Like many others, upon first reading of the *Chansons spirituelles*, I was struck by the seeming audacity that pervades her verse. As has been pointed out, Marguerite argues admirably for many evangelical tenants in the songs as she remains faithful to the Catholic Church. She

supported and protected the group of evangelicals at Meaux who sought to reform the Church from within, and evidence of her continued correspondence with Pope Clement VII validates the notion that Marguerite remained a dedicated Catholic for her whole life. Similar to other artists in Marguerite's day, she did not feel the need to confine herself firmly to one theological camp or another. She willingly investigated the many sides of an argument and formulated her own opinion. This resistance to authority pervades many poems where I see Marguerite as a creative force who demonstrates her own notion of humanity's mystical relationship with God despite others who would refuse to her the right even to speak of such matters, as Henri d'Albret tried to do.

As I continued to read the poems, this equivalence between her evangelical leanings and her attachment to Catholicism sensitized me to other tensions present throughout the poems. The analysis below, I hope, begins to unravel, or perhaps better, identify the constituent parts of, some of these often contradictory stances the Queen takes on diverse issues such as the notion of feminine identity in a society dominated by patriarchy, dealing with the authority of the Word of God as an author or trying to more clearly define who she was as an individual.

Anyone involved in Renaissance studies recognizes that this question of identity – whether gender-based, theological or psychological – continues to grow increasingly important, and that it is easy to try to fit early modern fashionings of the individual into modern or post-modern contexts. New historicism, for example, seeks to reverse and overturn the silencing of feminine and other minority voices by highlighting the ways these individuals spoke against or subverted the dominant cultural and/or religious paradigms. Such an approach always requires a retrospective stance. It is tempting to read Marguerite's poetry in this light and find a strong-willed persona who knew what she believed and aggressively defended her ideas and expressed

herself even in print, and even when it caused the brother she so dearly adored to caution her and go so far as to request her to stop and leave the court for a while. However, upon closer investigation, it is clear that Marguerite may not be so sure of exactly who she was on any level. Different structurings of the individual within the Queen's poetry foster a somewhat shattered experience of the self and often take the shape of an ambiguous interaction between the poetic persona's interior thoughts and feelings and her external circumstances. Giving attention to the social, religious, philosophical and artistic context in which Marguerite was writing calls into question a simplistic overview of her poetry and her conception of the "self" as an individual in the modern understanding of the word. Furthermore, it provides clues as to how at least one Renaissance woman constructed and experienced her identity in an array of contexts and how she sought (successfully or not) to communicate this identity through her poetry.

The difficulty, then, is not to give too much emphasis or priority to either sphere, but rather to examine the relationship between the two, that space where they meet. Obviously, some dominant Renaissance arguments concerning the question of free will, for example, favor internal analysis, but the pages that follow seek to show that this is not the case for the Queen of Navarre. She does not limit the notion of self to either a purely inward or simply external phenomenon. As I will demonstrate, there are instances of a strong sense of interiority when a poem's speaker struggles with his or her own soul under temptation and questions of the will are directly broached. However, these are not univocal in the *Chansons*, for there are also episodes in which the poetic persona experiences a loss of interiority. The speaker sits outside of his or her body or loses control of him or herself due to violent forces from the outside. For Marguerite, losing self-awareness could be a deleterious event leading to the impossibility of true relationships with others or it could paradoxically also result in a deeper sense and expression of

her own voice. This results in a highly variegated individual in the poems. Marguerite's poems reveal that their author was acutely aware of complex social forces and her own inwardness, but that she was also uncertain regarding the boundaries between the two.

Such complicated and multi-faceted investigations often defy clear categorization. Similarly to Terrence Cave when considering Rabelais, Ronsard and Montaigne in his *Pré-histoires*, I seek here not so much to answer every question one could pose about the *Chansons spirituelles*. Cave finds that Rabelais' *Quart Livre* or Montaigne's *Essais* exemplify a

synecdoque de tout un faisceau de perceptions *possibles* qui resteraient autrement inaccessibles, perdues dans le vaste naufrage de l'histoire; mais le 'tout' que le texte synecdochique semble designer ne sera jamais susceptible d'être articulé. Cette sorte d'histoire ne peut se faire que par fragments, tirant sa valeur même de l'incomplétude. (177)

I hope to bring together some of these fragments concerning the conceptual evolution of the notion of the self in the poetry of Marguerite de Navarre as she develops the idea and struggles with it across various domains. I expand on Cave's thesis that sixteenth-century texts are "troublés" by applying it to a female writer and consider how she expresses herself and what would attract and/or repulse readers as they perceived and understood what she says in her poetry. The following pages endeavor to establish what makes Marguerite's text troubled and troubling in the context of the sixteenth century. Therefore, I choose to focus much of my discussion on the poems themselves and begin with the notion that they speak most clearly about how she was interacting or desired to connect with the culture around her. Accordingly, I do begin each chapter with an introduction to how Marguerite's predecessors and contemporaries

were responding to the same questions concerning identity in the chapter's given context so as to situate the Queen's songs in their historical and ideological environment, but I choose to spend the majority of my time examining a variety of poems in-depth moving from the particular to the general (and sometimes back again). This method, as Cave clarifies, "toujours provisoire, toujours partielle" (15), does allow me to begin to sketch a broad outline of how Marguerite engaged with these questions to add to the ongoing discussion concerning individualism and the self in the early modern period in France.

In order to approach the *Chansons spirituelles* from this perspective, I have chosen to unify a broad array of cultural domains by considering them through the lens of tension. I propose to look at a series of themes – theology, gender, poetics and violence – and demonstrate the common thread of uneasiness concerning selfhood that connects these diverse fields of investigation. Marguerite most clearly confronts the foundational nature of this sense of self in each of these domains when it is challenged. These threats often touch on more than one issue at a time. Therefore, I invite cross-referencing throughout the chapters and frequently refer back or ahead to something I have discussed or will consider in order to promote and encourage a consideration of many possible levels of interaction within the *Chansons*. This allows me to integrate what are often seen as divergent opinions about Renaissance identity in much the same way Marguerite often blends competing notions of theology, religion or philosophy.

Chronologically, the first of these ideas would be the Burckhardtian image of the Renaissance identity as a new kind of individual emerging from the Middle Ages that was eager to engage in self-expression. This person had previously been "conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category" (Burckhardt 143). Burckhardt attempted to explain the emergence of this idea and the consequential

flowering of creativity and economic advantage by documenting evidence of Renaissance men and women as self-willed agents who were conscious of the changes going on about and were actively engaged themselves in bringing about these societal and cultural (r)evolutions. In this way, they become the modern individual's immediate predecessors; they begin to look, act and feel just as we do. Marguerite does appropriate for herself a certain authority in rebellion against the accepted leaders in society, and she definitely challenges the theological, gender and poetic norms of the day. Styling herself to be quite the individualist by transforming, and ultimately rejecting, medieval lyrical tropes, for example, she would appear to fit clearly within Burckhardt's model of Renaissance identity.

Of course, Burckhardt's thesis, first published in 1860, has not gone without serious challenges, and is now largely considered, at best, an incomplete accounting for the forces at work in the Renaissance which produced the modern notion of the "individual." The most famous and influential of such rebuttals is Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning*. In this book, the author paints a different picture of identity in the Renaissance. Greenblatt credits largely impersonal social, economic and political forces with creating what seems to be the freely expressive individual. He states that "so far as [he] could tell...the human subject began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of relations of power in a particular society" (257). Such coercive energies are also clearly at work in Marguerite's poetry as she can be observed questioning herself, wondering who she is and experimenting how to express herself in face of these social pressures. This may be seen, perhaps most clearly, through her treatment of God's Word in her poetry, but also as she broaches questions of gender, the self and violence. The uncertainty inherent in the tenuous positions she takes on each of these issues would lend strength to Greenblatt's analysis.

At different times, Marguerite postulates her notion of the self in different ways. In this project, therefore, I attempt to study Marguerite's *chansons* from neither Burckhardt's nor Greenblatt's absolute positions. Instead, I frame my analysis largely within John Jefferies Martin's theory that "if there was a constant in the Renaissance experience of identity, it had to do with different ways of thinking about what we might call, provisionally at least, the relation of the internal to the external self" (7). In other words, what Martin proposes about fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice (his "Renaissance") will be applied to Marguerite de Navarre's poetry. Considering her work through this lens will lead to a multiform and fluid vision of the self on many levels and in many arenas. Martin finds five "versions" of the self at play in the Renaissance: the social or conforming self, the prudential self, the performative self, the porous self, and the sincere self, going on to demonstrate quite convincingly that "[...] many Renaissance men and women had little sense of the self as a necessarily bounded and well-demarcated thing: a single body containing a single soul" (18). I will seek to examine how Marguerite exhibits or repudiates these identities as she explores her own throughout the songs and to what extent it is possible to observe multiple Marguerites.

Of course, I am not endeavoring to analyze Marguerite's actual life through her poetry. Instead, it better suits my goals to look at the nature of the relationship between the self as she portrays it or enunciates it through the various speakers to whom she gives voice in her poetry. I do make reference to events in Marguerite's life as they pertain to her poetry, but the main thrust of my discussion will be to consider how she is accessible to us through her poetry and how she reveals notions of identity in the Renaissance rather than a focus on her biography. Though it is possible to read the work biographically since she does mention particular events from her life that touched her deeply and even inspired her to write, such as the death of her brother, I choose

to focus on the portrait of the self that Marguerite creates for us through the voices that inhabit her poetic universe rather than trying to determine to what extent Abel Lefranc was correct when he called the last of the *Chansons* a “testament littéraire.”⁴

The following considerations also depend on understanding the contemporary audience to whom Marguerite was writing and who were receiving and interacting with her work. In this sense, Renaissance France and the ideas that were circulating at that time will inform my analysis; accordingly, I do spend time in each chapter developing key concepts and ideas trying to establish the context within which Marguerite’s thoughts would have been expressed. As one of most influential scholars on Marguerite, Lucien Febvre, stated, “En fait un homme du XVI^e siècle doit être intelligible non par rapport à nous, mais par rapport à ses contemporains. Ce n’est point à nous et à nos idées, c’est à eux et à leurs idées qu’il faut les référer” (14-15).

It is my contention that Marguerite constructed or presented different voices or projections of the self through her text as a response to her contemporaries. These poetic voices give us glimpses of various aspects of the notion she had of “identity.” Not only conscious of the fact that she was creating a literary identity, Marguerite actively worked to promote her own voice in her poetry. This is not to say that they she did not paradoxically try to efface herself from the text. What is observable at many levels is a tension underscoring the concepts of individuality and inwardness that Marguerite’s poetry explores. This consternation is at once self-empowering, self-shattering and constantly changing (Marshall 12).⁵

Chapter Descriptions

⁴ This singular life is well documented in other works. See for example Jourda, Reid.

⁵ Marshall speaks in her book of the self-shattering of English Protestant writers in the late sixteenth century. I observe similar, yet different personalized expressions of the same phenomenon especially in chapter four of this project.

In the first chapter, I intend to demonstrate the fluid nature of the Queen's theology when dealing with questions of literary subjectivity in the context of God's Word. Though embracing the evangelical principle of *sola scriptura*, Marguerite manages to create a space where her voice and God's intermingle and co-exist. This leads to a multiplicity of views on sin, salvation, Biblical authority and, ultimately, who has the right to speak in her poetry. In order to analyze how these questions are dealt with in the *Chansons spirituelles*, I first lay the theological framework within which the author worked. Thus, starting with Augustine and proceeding to the contemporary influence of Guillaume Briçonnet and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, this chapter traces the development of the theological concepts of sin and salvation and how different groups in the sixteenth century used these words in discussions concerning the metaphysical. As with much of the vocabulary in the Queen's poetry, these words have a double valence that adds to their ambiguity. For example, sin can be both good and bad, depending on the context. The two-sided meaning of these particular words lie at the heart of Marguerite's poetic problematic according to Georges Dottin, whose critical edition of the *Chansons* continues to be extremely useful (xix). The instability these vacillating meanings introduce also leads to a dialectic relationship between Marguerite's text and God's Word.

I will show that in addition to the authorial effacement, what Robert Cottrell terms a "grammar of silence" in the Queen's devotional poetry, there is also a tension that arises as she simultaneously carves out a space for her own poetic voice to emerge and be heard. She often frames this division as that between body and soul or between speaking and silence. This voice appears, however, not in the form of words; rather, Marguerite speaks of sighing and mumbling and murmuring in ways that promote a more fluid communication between herself and God and between herself and others in her environment. Such wordless communication results in a

blurring of lines between the interior and exterior selves and often surfaces in her poems as an amalgamation of literary subject and object. A similar development had been going on since the Middle Ages, but Marguerite's poems rework and "desecularize" this fusion as compared to her immediate medieval predecessors. The wordless expression provides one of the spaces in which we can most clearly hear Marguerite's voice as it blends with the Divine *Logos*. It lies at the heart of her desire to express herself and the evangelical undertow that also characterizes her writing.

Moving from sighing to wailing, Marguerite's voice takes on yet another aspect as her persona pictures herself unable to communicate with human reason and language. While desiring to allow God's voice to be heard through her and to point her readers to the Word of God, Marguerite, the author, finds herself unable to erase her presence from the texts. The poems simultaneously point the reader to God and to Marguerite. This chapter concludes by highlighting the imbrication of subject and object foreshadowing coming apprehensions surrounding the relationship between author and text through the lens of the evangelical doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

Continuing to look at sources of tension that lead to slippages in Marguerite's conception of the self, I turn in chapter two to the question of gender. Women's role in society at the time Marguerite was writing often resulted in an extension of the Pauline admonishment that women should not teach in church to a silencing of female voices in any public arena. Marguerite's "femaleness" causes her to question her authority and adds complexity to the notion of herself as an individual in such a male-dominated context. This chapter deals with the Queen's challenges and submissiveness to male patriarchy and relates very much to the question of voice that was raised in the first chapter in a theological context. It opens with a survey of socio-religious views

of “feminism” in the sixteenth century and religious and secular writings by women both before and after Marguerite. The *Chansons spirituelles* also contain some of these features, but I highlight important instances where the text directly criticizes men and places women on a higher spiritual plane.

Perhaps surprisingly, I also find instances when the poems insist upon a reversal of traditional gender roles and transfer power to the female. The majority of these poems mix a strategy of subordination with subversion and, albeit briefly, demonstrate alternatives to male-dominated gender relations. Within the context of these spiritual songs, Marguerite offers herself as an example to be emulated. Subsequently, I follow the presence of the Virgin Mary in the poems; the bivalent nature of her condition in evangelical circles correlates well to the problematic status of a female writer such as Marguerite in the sixteenth century and serves as a metaphor for both female expression and restraint. Building on Leah Chang’s work on sixteenth-century publication of women’s work, the chapter concludes by pointing to a more balanced female spirituality in Marguerite’s work that later writers such as Louise Labé will secularize and further.

Chapter three explores the ideas of selfhood and subjectivity presented in the previous two chapters by focusing the discussion on Marguerite de Navarre’s rhetorical manipulations throughout the *Chansons spirituelles*. Continuing to deal with anxiety or uncertainty about who she is in relationship to God and to others, the author infuses her poems with personalized, and sometimes reversed, poetic topoi. The back-and-forth exchange across literary tropes, devices and genres adds to the polysemous picture of the self that began to emerge in the first chapter. The different rhetorical permutations Marguerite experiments with give rise alternately to a humanistic self-affirming author and a committed self-abjecting evangelical. The poems

accomplish this by dislocating the notions of selfhood and literary subjectivity in several ways, including personified abstractions. Her manipulation of traditional allegorical figures allows her to create an artificial nearness to her reader and at the same time hold herself (or rather, her poetic persona) up as a desirable model to emulate. This self is held hostage between her humanistic desire for self-empowerment and the evangelical constraint of self-denial.

One of the clearest examples of this mutable self occurs in one of the longer songs in which the speaker in the poem searches for a *malheureuse* and observes this unfortunate wanderer as she crosses mountainous terrain in search of her lover. This part of my investigation finds its roots in Tom Conley's *The Graphic Unconscious*. He shows that texts in the early Renaissance were synthesized creations allowing for both the transcriptive ability of human language as well as "spatial, figural and iconographic value independent of" such function (1992 4). Echoing the Scriptural reminder in Jeremiah 17:9 that "[t]he heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it," Marguerite projects an image of the self that quite unstable, unknowable and mysterious through this multifaceted topographical experience. She also exemplifies what John Calvin said concerning the inward-focus of self-study: "[T]he human heart has so many crannies where vanity hides, so many holes where falsehood lurks, is so decked out with deceiving hypocrisy, that it often dupes itself." This self-deception discloses the fact that even Marguerite did not completely understand to know herself.

In my final chapter, I expand on the contrasting ideas of restraint and liberation and interiority as they relate to violence in the *Chansons spirituelles*. As she manipulates the presentation of brutality in the songs, Marguerite conveys the elusive nature of sixteenth-century selfhood as she comprehends it. These permutations of violence both construct and destroy the speaker in the poems and invite the reader to interact with the text through a fluidity of emotions

and subjective positions. Violence in the poems highlights a tension not easily categorized and points to an imbricated, or even divided, self that is constantly aware of her own inwardness (i.e. what she is feeling and what she believes) and how she should face the various circumstances in which she finds herself. Depending on the context – familial or spiritual – violence may be a legitimate means of self-expression.

Furthermore, Marguerite maintains that brutality, like other concepts in the *Chansons*, also conveys and hides information about one's self. As with the other chapters, I hope to demonstrate that one of the most intriguing features of Marguerite's notion of the self is that it is purposefully layered. This layering allows for a definite inward turn as the author explores her own self through her poetic persona, but it also shrouds this self in mystery. In the end, Marguerite is not able to sustain a cohesive, integrated view of the self, and finds herself using violence in various ways to experiment with communicating her inner reality to her external surroundings and experiences. The opacity brought on by violence leads to a masochistic embrace of the pain and suffering that violence brings into the life of a given poem's speaker.

Far from an exhaustive catalogue of the early modern origins of the self, what I present in the pages that follow is an effort at listening to what one sixteenth-century writer thought about her *for intérieur*. Marguerite's poetry reveals many answers to the question of identity and how the author struggles to make sense of this burgeoning concept. Conceiving of the notion of the self as emerging during this period of history permits an approximate response to this question by allowing for uncertainty on the author's part and helps avoid thinking of the sixteenth century as the precise moment when the concept of the self suddenly burst into life.

Furthermore, a definite Pyrrhonian doubt as to the nature of the individual pervades the songs. This skepticism highlights an anxiety in Marguerite's work that reflects a broader epistemological and ontological neurosis in the culture. By mapping one writer's approach to the concern, I am undertaking to provide a clearer description of what those in the past thought of these issues and how they reacted to them. Many of Marguerite's songs have a clearly literal sense and seem insignificant or inconsequential to such overarching societal concerns. However, the slight aberrations from the expected that would cause the reader to pause point to a more fundamental struggle than what would appear on the surface. These are the moments when Marguerite's mask drops and that expose a worried self-consciousness. She never separates her individuality from connections with others, and it would be impossible to classify her many "selves" in any of the categories such as modern or post-modern that characterize our contemporary notion of the individual. By applying Marguerite's findings to her specific circumstances and by comparing them with other similar notions or contrasting them to opposing ideas, it becomes evident that selfhood for the Queen was something oblique but worth trying to uncover. The current study seeks to echo Marguerite's own analysis by examining the self through her diverse and diffuse optic in order to catalogue one individual's poetic representation of the fragmented self.

Chapter 1 – Theological Tensions

Introduction

The focal point of this chapter will be a broad discussion of how a variety of poems in the *Chansons spirituelles* treat Marguerite's religious thought and represent religious tensions that permeated contemporary society. After introducing the theological framework concerning humanity's fallen nature, I will discuss how the poems in this collection construe and respond to questions surrounding the physical nature of human existence and humanity's relationship to God in terms of sin and salvation (the spiritual side of life). It will become evident that the texts present an unstable vision of humanity's relationship to God. Through the contradictory use of certain verbs of noise making, Marguerite presents a vision of humankind's condition that is anything but univocal. The physical body and sin become both the source of the awareness of the need for God (as opposed to Scripture by itself) and the obstacle to meeting this need. In addition to the nature of the relationship between God and humanity, the question of the role of Scripture also divided sixteenth-century France. I will demonstrate that the concept of authority and who has the right to speak presents challenges the Lutheran idea and Protestant tenant of *sola scriptura*. Though Marguerite clearly holds to the belief that God's Word is the ultimate authority, her poems testify to the struggle of restraining one's individual poetic voice in order to give way to the divine *Verbum*. As the Queen's poetic persona shifts in and out of the subject position in her poems, the reader is often left without a clear indication of whose voice is speaking. These two sources of theological tension inform and inspire the *Chansons spirituelles*. Though they remain unresolved throughout the collection of poems, considering these two sources of theological tension allows for a deeper understanding of Marguerite's individualized

brand of evangelical humanism, and they begin to lay the framework for future secular writers to more fully explore the self.⁶

Dealing with Sin

Early evangelicals under Marguerite's protection at Meaux who influence the Queen's thought and stress God's grace as the solution to the human struggle with sin include spiritual leaders and companions Guillaume Briçonnet and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples.⁷ They part from traditional Catholic soteriology which views the sacraments as the avenue through which God's grace redeems the sinner and, therefore, requires the reception of the sacraments for salvation. These evangelicals argue that it is by God's favor alone, apart from the sacraments, that people are able to receive salvation. While those in the circle at Meaux did not deny, for example, the sacrament of baptism, for them, God's bestowal of His grace, rather than the reception of the sacraments themselves, evidences His love for His elect and begins the process that brings the humble soul to a state of union with the Divine. In the first step of this process, God's grace purifies the penitent from the sin that distracts his soul from desiring spiritual things. So, sin serves a double function in the believer's life. First, she must become aware that she is a sinner in need of God's grace. An awareness of sin is necessary for the law to fulfill its purpose and point the believer's heart to God. Once she is cognizant of sin's presence, she must purge her life (or more precisely, she must allow God to purge her) of that very sin that made her aware of her need to be cleansed.

According to Georges Dottin's introduction to his edition of the *Chansons spirituelles*, this double nature of sin and its complex relationship with the believer lies at the heart of

⁶ Marguerite authored the poems over a period of many years. Some of the poems were published with the *Marguerites* as noted above. Others were published separately and some posthumously.

⁷ The specific contributions of these and other early evangelicals will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Marguerite's poetic problematic. He summarizes the religious or theological tension in the Queen's poetry as a "réconciliation des contraires" (xix). Without the certain surety of salvation that the objective reception of the sacraments provided, she is never quite confident of her standing here on earth. Marguerite's poetry often foregrounds this worry and highlights a sense of theological instability concerning the unknowability of a soul's standing with God that the Queen is keenly aware of in her own life.

Concerning the individual's relationship with God, Marguerite's poems generally describe a soul's progression toward fellowship or communion with God. The Queen describes this movement in more detail in her longer devotional poetry. As the seminal work considering the ascendant nature of these poems, Paula Sommers' analysis provides a starting point for discussing the shorter *chansons*. Sommers argues that *Les Prisons* (left in manuscript and published posthumously only in 1896) is Marguerite's most developed theological and poetic expression. Sommers concludes that

[i]n *Les Prisons* mystical union occurs between *Tout* and *Rien* and the choice of such abstract vocabulary deliberately transcends any concept of generic identity. The designated 'target' for Marguerite's spiritual trajectory is absolute freedom, and that freedom implies freedom from carnal instincts and appetites, from language, sexuality, the body and the self. (109)

To experience the freedom defined in her more developed spiritual poetry, Marguerite must first deal with sin. Her *Chansons spirituelles* confront this problem and yield an ambiguous response to the question of sin in the believer's life, its implications for human nature, and its consequences for her relationship with God. Though sin remains the soul's mortal enemy, Marguerite formulates the idea of iniquity in several different ways throughout the *Chansons* in

order to highlight different aspects of its nature. Sin is always something to be avoided, yet its existence makes the human soul more needful of God's grace and more cognizant of its own nothingness and the fullness of the Divine. Paradoxically, sin opens the way to understanding and experiencing God's grace, and it is to be avoided or purged. Of course, the believer must ultimately reject sin, but it also initially makes one aware of her need for Christ's grace.

This dialectic nature of sin finds its full theological expression later in the Protestant position of salvation by grace through faith alone for God's elect. Salvation depends less (or, more accurately, not at all) on human works, and God bestows it on whomever He wishes through a sovereign act.⁸ I will argue that Marguerite embraces to a large extent this teaching and that her poems caution against excessive human love as a replacement or substitute for divine love. Erotic, or even familial, love misleads those who fall prey to it, and placing one's hopes in such love results in disappointment and, ultimately, death. Outward signs of religion might indicate that one has abandoned the true path toward unity with God and has chosen to pursue human love by impressing others. Through her poems, Marguerite posits that human attempts to do good, to please God or even to atone for wrong are doomed to failure because they are stained with original sin. Those who persist in their attempts to appease God solely through outward manifestations of religion will be victimized by a false sense of fulfillment and passing pleasure. In the end, they will be left with the empty shells of concupiscence, ambition, and, most dangerously, pride.

Foundations

⁸ Of course Calvin and others affirmed the importance of works and the sacraments, including the Eucharist, but only to the extent that they were outward evidences of God's election of an individual and pointed to the inclusion of the individual in a spiritual community of true believers.

Augustinian thought lays the foundation for Marguerite's poetic exploration of human nature. Augustine articulates a Christianized Platonic division between the body and the spirit.⁹ According to Augustine, the path to God consists of traveling from the lower to the higher, and the only way to attain this path is through understanding oneself as *inner*. God illumines a self-reflexivity that distinguishes human beings from the animals in order to allow humankind to have access to Him. As opposed to Plato who posited an inward road that leads to the Ideas, Augustine proposes a route to God not only through observation of the created world but "within" oneself. He says, "Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas" (Do not go out, go back within yourself; in the inner man resides truth).¹⁰

One can only discover this truth when God illumines the seeker's heart. God, then, becomes not only the desired object but also grants the power to see Him. According to St. John, Jesus Christ is the light "which lighteth every man" (John 1:9).¹¹ Moving from a philosophical consideration of the Ideas to the actual activity of knowing is an important shift, for it opens the door to an intensely inward focus. Each person is encouraged to know God personally and to be engaged in the activity of knowing God in a particular manner.

Early evangelicals seized upon this turn and reworked it in the theological language of faith and grace. As Gary Ferguson notes, traditional Catholic soteriology pictures salvation as "two equally balanced halves, each of which remains ineffective without the other" (*Mirroring* 13). Through this theological lens, God's redemptive grace works with man's restored free will to effect the soul's salvation. The process of justification is a concert between God in holiness and man striving toward holiness. In the early part of the sixteenth century, Luther and other theologians began reworking the inherited view of salvation from Augustine's writings. Whereas

⁹ See Taylor, esp. p. 127.

¹⁰ *De vera Religione*, XXXIX. 72.

¹¹ All scripture references will come from the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

Augustine argued for a renewal of the inner man, Luther posited that man's soul was forever lost and a slave to sin. Humankind's propensity to sin is an effect of its will being the slave of sin. Augustine's *liberum arbitrium captivatum* is replaced by Luther's *servum arbitrium*¹² in Protestant circles. Only as a sinner comes to understand himself as totally depraved (through God's illumination) can he move toward God. An inner awareness is a prerequisite to salvation, but justification is not a process; for Luther, it is a unique and entirely external imputation of Christ's righteousness upon the believer (McGrath 213).

Luther later modifies his theory of justification to include both a process and a moment in time. The more mature understanding provides that though a believer may receive the external blessing of God's grace, there are internal ramifications. Namely, the new Christian is indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Christ, through the person of the Holy Spirit, now actually resides within the person. The individual is at once "spiritual and carnal, righteous and a sinner, good and evil" (McGrath 226). The tenuous relationship or co-existence of the spirit and the flesh that will dominate Marguerite's poetic construction is adumbrated here, but as I will demonstrate, she distinguishes herself from Luther in that her poetry expresses a partial regeneration in the believer's life. The penitent sinner in Marguerite's poems is never sure of her justification. She often hesitates between the body and the spirit.

More directly influential on the poet than Luther, the circle at Meaux has various views of justification. Beginning in the early 1500's, evangelicals such as Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Guillaume Briçonnet congregated under the protection and patronage of the King Francis I's sister, Marguerite de Navarre. Marguerite was an active participant in and agent of the group.¹³

¹² The idea here is that the human will is held captive by divine grace and is incapable of attaining a righteous standing without God's intervening aid in the form of His grace.

¹³ For a summary of Marguerite's actions on behalf of several evangelical causes and people, see Lazard 323, and for a thorough cataloguing of Marguerite's evangelical network of associates, see Reid.

Lefèvre, for example, in his early exegesis of Paul's letters does "not fully prefigure Luther's understanding of *sola fides*" but points to the work of God's grace in a sinner's life as the only means of salvation and justification (Reid 129). He also downplays the role of human efforts at salvation without specifically calling into question the church's teachings on spiritual matters. A more mature Lefèvre, however, would go on to reject completely the cult of saints because "saints' legends promoted idolatry by inspiring people to pray to them as intercessors instead of Christ" (Reid 137). Lefèvre's influence on Marguerite's interpretation of salvation by grace through faith would continue to grow throughout their relationship (Reid 186).¹⁴

His influence on the Queen's spirituality is not exclusive. Guillaume Briçonnet also exerts significant guidance during her theological development. Concerning the concept of justification, he most importantly argues for a sinner's three-step progression towards salvation. Paula Sommers points out this progression in the Queen's ladder poems as they highlight the sinner's condition in the stages of *purgatio*, *illuminatio*, *perfectio* (*Ladders* 11-12). *Purgatio* is purification, repentance and reform. *Illuminatio* involves a higher degree of spiritual learning. *Perfectio* is equated with celestial bliss or prolonged mystical rapture (12). The dependent relationship between *illuminatio* (where one gains supernatural spiritual understanding of God's Word) and *perfectio* (where that understanding is worked out in spiritual ecstasy) becomes the focus of many of the *chansons*.¹⁵

This necessity for inner understanding and discovery leads to a first-person stance necessary to grasp one's own sinfulness and is the hinge upon which the modern view of the

¹⁴ Reid notes that Lefèvre had been giving spiritual lessons to the king's sister prior to her correspondence with Briçonnet (which began in 1521). He goes on to note that "Marguerite was certainly seeking spiritual nourishment when she turned to Briçonnet, but not simply, nor even principally, from him."

¹⁵ The importance of God's Word as it pertains to this tripartite progression in the *chansons* is the focus of a later section of this chapter. I will show that though Marguerite holds to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, she does so with significant trepidation. Her own desire to speak becomes a source of tension as she tries to maintain the idea that her poetry is but an avenue for the divine voice.

fragmented self swings. What Luther and others argue for is more than an objective realization that one's sinfulness separates one from God. Though faith alone is enough to save a person, the faith must be of the right kind and quality. Seizing upon texts such as James 2:19¹⁶, evangelicals and, later, Protestants (starting especially with Calvin) stress the need for a deeper, personalized experience of one's own sinfulness and God's goodness than mere intellectual assent or inherited belief. The true believer speaks of her experience with God from a first-person standpoint in a self-reflexive way that distinguishes her experience from all others.¹⁷

For the poet, her experience becomes the object of her discourse. Marguerite expands upon this idea of individuality. Her struggle with this refined view of salvation infuses her poetry with highly self-reflexive language and images and distinguishes it from other contemporaries. The theological battle between faith and works becomes a poetic battle between inner and outer, spirit and body, silence and speech. The following analysis will demonstrate that the Queen of Navarre adds a distinctive first-person voice to theological debates concerning these issues and lays the foundation for later writers and philosophers such as Montaigne to more fully explore the individual self.

As a point of departure, the second of Marguerite's *chansons*, "Las, tant malheureuse je suis," highlights the simultaneous tension and harmony between body and soul in the speaker's personal experience. The poem begins with a first-person declaration that defines the experience of her own suffering as the subject of her song. The first word, "Las," abruptly draws the reader

¹⁶ "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." Catholics on the other hand used this verse as a proof text for refuting Lutheran teachings regarding a faith-only salvation. Traditional theologians, such as Augustine, pointed out that James' characterization of saving faith is validated by works of charity. Catholic writers at the beginning of the sixteenth century rejected doctrine that teaches a man can be saved with faith only (and neglecting the importance of works). For a complete discussion of Catholic and evangelical views of faith, see Ferguson, 147-61.

¹⁷ Opposed to this personalized experience within the individual, Catholics saw faith as being evidenced by works of charity – *fides caritate formata*. Works, for the Catholic, came alongside faith. The difference between the two views being the qualities that revealed redeeming faith.

into the personal torment the persona is wallowing in. The reader has no introduction to the source of the suffering; instead the language of the poem thrusts the experience of separation and desperation upon her.

The opening lines continue to foreground the narrator's first-person stance. She declares, "Las, tant malheureuse je suis / Que mon malheur dire ne puis" (1-2). By so doing, she makes herself and her experience of sadness and grief the subject and object of the discourse. The lines that follow express what she claims to be the inexpressible nature of her grief. By linking her being with her professed inability to communicate her sentiments through the logic of language, the narrator highlights her awareness of more than the fact of her brother's death or even the pain that comes as a result of it. She is acutely aware of her experience of suffering.

This poetic expression of pain and suffering reflects Marguerite's individual view of salvation as an ongoing process. Through an extensive survey of the Queen's later poems and her plays, Gary Ferguson concludes that Marguerite developed a belief that human nature remained sinful even after an individual experiences some conversion or union with Christ (*Mirroring* 47). Though it may be argued that this is not an orthodox Catholic view of salvation, Ferguson suggests that it is not a purely evangelical view of the nature of salvation either. It does not go to the extremes of either Calvin or the Spiritual Libertines, but it does reflect an openness to evangelical and, even, Protestant ideas regarding the experience of salvation (48).¹⁸ What distinguishes my understanding of this poem from the poems Ferguson analyzes is the emphasis on the personal experience of grief and pain as the source of her knowledge of God. The believer becomes keenly aware of her lost condition and is constantly reminded of it throughout life as

¹⁸ See especially note 46 on this page that explains the nuances distinguishing Marguerite's notion of the nature of justification from her contemporaries.

she wonders about her own status as elect. The perversity of the fallen will makes people act below and against their understanding. As the narrator of the *chanson* proclaims:

Seure je suis que son esprit
 Regne avec son chef Jesus Christ,
 Contemplant la divine essence.
 Combien que son corps soit prescript,
 Les promesses du saint Escrit
 Le font vivre au ciel, sans doutance. (25-30)

She is confident that her brother is experiencing more divine rapture in Paradise than he could here on earth. Her faith purportedly rests in the promises found in Scripture. Her insight, though, does not temper the grief she feels at his departure. The sinner, likewise, may be able to believe truths about his justified status as God's elect, but her awareness of her experience contradicts this revelation.

Localization

Thus far, the discussion has centered on Marguerite's poetic reworking of Augustinian conceptions of humankind's inner nature and the turn toward the inner person that Augustine provokes. This inward turn correlates to Marguerite's poetic of reflexivity and its centrality to her spiritual life. Another result of this inward turn is the clear boundary between the physical and the spiritual. Marguerite's poetry seems to be acutely aware of the limits between the two while at the same time uncomfortable with the dualism.

One of the most famous and straight forward declarations of the Queen's view of the spirit/body division and link occurs in her more famous *Heptaméron*. In the nineteenth novella, Parlemente declares:

L'ame, qui n'est crée que pour retourner à son souverain bien, ne faict, tant qu'elle est dedans ce corps, que desirer d'y parvenir. Mais, à cause que les sens, par lesquelz elle en peut avoir nouvelles, sont obscurs et charnelz par le peché du premier père, ne luy peuvent monstrier que les choses visibles plus approchantes de la perfection, après quoy l'ame court, cuydant trouver, la souveraine beaulté, grace et vertu. (151)

For an example of how Marguerite's poetry expresses both contemporary bent towards dualism and a more orthodox Catholic understanding of the unity of body and soul, it suffices to return to the song considered above. Immediately after opening her poem with a lamentation over her personal experience of sadness, the poem's narrator turns to look out from herself, and she sees that "Desespoir est desjà à l'huys / Pour me jeter au fond du puits, / Où n'a d'en saillir apparence" (4-6). It appears that despair lies outside of the speaker's body. It becomes a personified abstraction or allegorical figure, yet it correlates to an internal state.¹⁹ The sadness she is currently experiencing enhances the despair that lurks on her soul's doorstep waiting to cast her into the bottomless pit that would separate her from God. As a weapon of the devil, Despair also deepens the poet's experience of grief. The attack comes from without as she sees Despair's cautious approach. The violence that characterizes Despair's actions only serves to highlight the feeling of vulnerability the narrator is experiencing. Additionally, the idea of free falling into an exitless pit excites the reader's identification with the persona's apprehension and sense of complete helplessness. The narrator is keenly aware of her inner experience of sadness in the previous lines, yet she is also cognizant of a deeper emotional pull that is coming from outside her body. It threatens a type of possession that is the very opposite of self-possession. As

¹⁹ I speak in more detail of Marguerite's use of spiritual allegory and its relationship to the notion of individuality in her poetry in chapter three.

the narrator turns inward to inspect and analyze her own experience, she is also drawn to the distinction between her particular sadness and the general feeling of despair.

The poem continues to conflate these two conceptions of emotional suffering by turning to bodily expressions of inner turmoil. The narrator uses various body parts and bodily functions to demonstrate the outward flow of her emotions. Immediately after describing the approach of Despair, its possession of her body, and the consequent flinging of her body into the pit that might result, the narrator reveals that her eyes are pouring forth tears (“Tant de larmes jettent mes yeux, / Qu’ilz ne voyent terre ne cieux, / Telle est de leur pleur abondance” 7-9). At once, the shift in focus reveals the narrator’s awareness that her experience is flowing outward. Moreover, the narrator’s eyes assume the same verb (*jeter*) Despair would use to cast the narrator into the pit in the previous stanza. Her body, no longer a passive victim of Despair’s mistreatment, becomes the very source of her emotional experience. Then, in an uncomfortable realization of the personal independence her body demonstrates, the narrator’s eyes both pour out the tears and are blinded by them. Her body assumes a position of power previously assigned to the external force of despair, and this action of throwing out tears so forcefully and in such quantity blinds the speaker rendering her unable to see either heaven or earth.

Such seamless conjuncture of the eye serving both self-empowering and self-defeating functions integrates well the teachings of Augustine and more contemporary evangelical teachers with whom Marguerite was familiar. According to Augustinian soteriology, man’s salvation is a combination of God’s grace (an external agent) and man’s cooperation (an internal reaction made possible by God’s grace). For Augustine, justification is both real and personal. God’s grace makes possible an individual’s response to grace. It at once motivates the quest for God

and presents itself as the object of that quest (Ferguson *Mirroring* 11-14).²⁰ God's light must shine on the individual soul to initiate the process of salvation. The term *liberum arbitrium captivatum* encapsulates the perversity of the will that makes humanity "act below and against our insight, and prevents us from becoming fuller and purer" (Taylor 138). Humans put themselves at the center of their world and relate everything they experience to themselves. As Taylor goes on to state:

This is both a cause and consequence of a kind of slavery, a condition in which we are in turn dominated, captured by our own obsessions and fascination with the sensible. So we can see that evil cannot be explained simply by lack of vision but involves something also in the dimension of the soul's sense of itself.

Reflexivity is central to our moral understanding. (138-39)

In Marguerite's text, the narrator's first-person, self-reflexive stance continues through the poem's development. This time, she records the outward flow, not from her eyes but from her mouth that has been reduced to complaining and pouring forth the incomprehensible and/or unintelligible sighs of her heart ("Ma bouche se plaint en tous lieux, / De mon cœur ne peult saillir mieux, / Que souspirs, sans nulle allegeance" 10-12).²¹ The outward flow of inner desperation is intensified by the use of the word "saillir." Just as the eyes released the tears that blinded them, the mouth issues forth not words but whispers that do not help to lighten her load.²² The desire of the poet is that these sighs would contain some meaning. The glimmer of hope that language promises is that of being able to communicate one's feelings to another understanding being. The burden would then be shared, and the one who is suffering would feel

²⁰ Ferguson sketches the development of Augustine's teachings through the Middle Ages. He presents the traditional Catholic view on justification as a balance between God's initial sovereign intervention in a person's life and man's subsequent obedience to God's and the church's commandments and ordinances.

²¹ I will expand on the idea of sighing and its role in the *Chansons spirituelles* in the following section.

²² According to the first entry in Cotgrave's 1611 *Dictionarie*, *saillir* means "To goe out, issue forth."

alleviated of some of her pain. The narrator's mouth, however, finds itself incapable of expressing the individualized turmoil within in a way that would make her understood by another. She is trying to articulate what she feels, yet she finds herself unable to do so in a clear manner that would connect her interlocutor with her interior struggle. The circle of communication that promised peace or comfort is closed off to her.

Another meaning of "saillir" highlights the feeling of infertility that permeates these lines. Cotgrave mentions that the verb can also connote "to ride, or leape one another, as the male doth the female." Just as the biological goal of copulation is to produce offspring, the relationship between the mouth and words should bear fruit in the life of the speaker. Despite the narrator's verbal efforts, there is no result. She finds her mouth incapable of producing the right kind of language that would lead to the "allegiance" of her heart that she is so desperately seeking.

Sighs and Murmurs

The only fruit this relationship bears is that of multiple "souspirs." Its most basic meaning carries notions of a sigh or murmur. To sigh is to give voice, even if only through a breath, to internal feelings. These emotions surface, perhaps even involuntarily, through that burst of breath to alert those around that there is turmoil within. Sighing is thus a form of communication, as it embodies thought. Likewise, murmuring, though perhaps closer to what we consider language or words than sighing, also outwardly exposes an individual's inner musings without the full force of language. These sounds represent an intriguing space between speech and silence that is typical of Marguerite's poetry. Recent research has investigated the link between the smothered sounds of sighing and murmuring and meditation (Stock). John Lyons also suggests that murmuring is a form of meditation that seeks to transcend dichotomies between mind and body and between the present and the future (527). I will demonstrate below

that considering moments of sighing and murmuring allows one to see how Marguerite de Navarre's poetry negotiates a similar concern between allowing the Word of God to speak and writing in order to articulate the author's own voice and interior struggles with authority.

Closely related to mispronunciation, murmuring represented for Protestants (and earlier evangelicals) a serious rhetorical mistake – especially when proclaiming the Word of God.²³ Those who misspoke while preaching or teaching were seen as improperly heralding the message of salvation and sanctification. Protestant and early evangelical leaders were particularly concerned with the mumbling of Latin phrases and prayers during mass. The inability of the majority of those in attendance to understand the meaning behind the words was a major issue in the Reformation. Scripture was meant to be communicated clearly. Reformers specifically targeted removing language that they viewed as cloaking its meaning or resisting interpretation during the ministration of the Word.

As Carla Mazzio notes in the works of English Protestants, “[...] mumbling suggested (at best) inaccessible content, (at worst) no content, and (either way) a passive or active resistance to the norms of community and communicability” (22). Mumbling (a more articulated version and, perhaps, voluntary version of sighing) in Marguerite's work is particularly important because the act of such wordless communication is an indefinite space that allows for personal expression. For Marguerite, inarticulate speech does not have such a strictly negative connotation. For example, in the lines referred to just above, her sighs and murmurs are the best she can do to express her sadness at her brother's death. A few lines later, though words are still absent, she laments:

²³ Carla Mazzio's analysis of this phenomenon focuses on biography, fiction and drama in early modern England. Her remarks regarding the Protestant (often more correctly, evangelical) aversion to mumbling and murmuring is of particular import and serve as an appropriate context for contemporary views of the subject while Marguerite was composing and publishing her poetry.

Je n'ay plus que la triste voix
 De laquelle crier m'en vois,
 En lamentant la dure absence.
 Làs, de celui pour qui vivois,
 Que de sy bon cœur je voyois,
 J'ay perdu l'heureuse presence. (19-24)

What she voices here may be words, but that would be contrary to what she described a few lines earlier when she said that her mouth can only produce, at best, sighs. I would also argue that the juxtaposition of absence and presence in these lines is intensified when the reader or listener imagines the wordless sounds of the anguishing sister. The absence of linguistic communication is replaced by the presence of the cries of her heart and the resulting sighs that escape from her lips. Her wordless communication gives way to pure contemplation in line 27 where she turns her mind to picture her brother reigning alongside Christ, and for a moment it seems as though the promises of God's Word, "Les promesses du saint Escrit" (29), will bring her the peace she seeks.

Quickly, however, she reminds herself that she is bodily separated from her dead sibling and her "[e]sprit et corps de dueil sont pleins" (43). Though the Bible speaks of being reunited with loved ones and victory over death, the poet's experience causes her to struggle with Scripture. Incapable of clearly formulating her response, wordless communication, once again, supplies her only source of comfort. She says "Seul pleurer est ma contenance. / Je crie par bois et par plains" (45-46). The mourner goes on to wish for all speaking to cease in death's ultimate silence when she says, "Il ne m'en fault donc plus parler" (58). These moments of wordless sighing, murmuring and crying begin to form a sort of progression toward the ultimate goal of

silence. They are viewed completely negatively by Protestants, but it is possible to see how they take on a more positive connotation as the sincere reaction of a mourning sister struggling with belief in the promises of the Word of God. These moments of the poet's quasi-speech surface through the seeming bibliocentrality of Marguerite's poems as they (involuntarily) question and marginalize the Bible with the author's own feelings and reactions. Though the last stanza of the poem makes it clear that she desires to be hushed forever through death, the uses of these non-words and whispers of her soul interject her own voice into the text and fashion her own self all the while maintaining the apparent longing for silence. In this way the poet's sighings, murmurings and cries can be read as her struggle with her personal (and evangelical) commitment to *sola scriptura*.

Another theological concern that this type of non-speech addresses is the doctrine of salvation since the act of mumbling allows one to bridge the gap between inner (soul) and outer (body). Contemporary evangelical and Catholic devotional writers such as Jean Bouchet, Victor Brodeau and Nicolle Bargedé, for example, were all preoccupied with describing how a soul was saved (Ferguson 14). Evangelicals were particularly prone to worry over the status of their souls. They realized a struggle within their own bodies, minds and souls that betrayed the residue of the "old man" even after salvation. This dual nature of man the justified sinner is summarized in Luther's "semper peccator, semper penitens, semper justus" (McGrath 226). This understanding of justification as extrinsic leads to Calvin's declaration that though man is justified by God, the believer receives Christ's own nature and is converted by God's power. He is then able to live in a manner that pleases the Almighty. God takes that which is defiled and imparts to the believer new life.

This theme of conversion, following the sense of the Latin roots of *conversare* “to turn around” and *convertere* “to turn back or reverse course,” also fits nicely within the framework of *contrafactum* that Marguerite is engaged in. Her *chansons* seek to appropriate and rework earlier texts and melodies in such a way as to point her audience to evangelical truths.²⁴ Just as in the evangelical view of God’s work of justification man is endowed with a new nature, Marguerite’s poems convert the themes, images and vocabulary of her medieval lyrical predecessors to serve her evangelical goals. She highlights doctrines concerning justification, the authority of God’s Word and the role of saints. She also weaves her own version of mystical meditation by careful reworking of the medieval love lyric and connects both contemporary theological beliefs as discussed above, and as I show below, these theological aspects of the *Chansons spirituelles* contribute to the emerging philosophical idea of a mutable individual self that foreshadows later writers’ fascination with the individual.

This focalization on the individual is not, of course, a Eureka moment whereupon the self emerges during the Renaissance or Reformation out of the medieval emphasis on the universal as opposed to the particular.²⁵ In fact, the “discovery” of the individual and its eventual “deconstruction” had been going on since Augustine and the birth of Christianity (Jenneret 152).²⁶ Marguerite’s poetry is not immune to the influence of this theme that is developed in both contemporary religious as well as medieval secular lyrical contexts. I would like to begin with the lyrical poetry of the Middle Ages and consider how these two seemingly distinct lineages converge at the relationship between sighing and speech and ultimately point to the empowerment of the individual in the *Chansons spirituelles*.

²⁴ More on this aspect of the *chansons* in chapter three, which concerns poetic tension in the work.

²⁵ For the classic extensive study of the emergence of the self in the Middle Ages see Zink. Regarding Guillaume de Machaut’s particular contributions, see Cerquiglini.

²⁶ I will discuss further Augustinian thought and its direct influence on Marguerite’s poetry below.

Starting with Boethius in the fifth century and continuing on through Allain de Lille in the twelfth, the idea of creating an allegorized center of authority in a work in order to bring about a cure or relief from internal suffering begins to dominate religious contemplative writing. Guillaume de Machaut's fourteenth century *Remede de Fortune*, perhaps most famously, transitions this remedy for purely religious suffering to a cure for secularized love-longing. In Machaut's poem, the Lover presents his silent service to Love as an example to be followed. He writes poems praising his lady. The first image of the lady as healer and the first link between speech and healing comes in the still silent poet's first *lai*. He writes:

Encor y a maint resort:

Remembrer,

Ymager,

En dous plaisir

Sa dame veoir, oïr,

Son gentil port,

Le recort

Dou bien qui sort

De son parler

Et de son douls regarder,

Dont l'entrouvrir

Puet garir

Et garantir

Amant de mort. (445-48)²⁷

²⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all references to and translations of the *Remede de Fortune* come from James I. Wimsatt and William W. Kibler's edition.

Here, obviously, the healer is the object of his love. The poet talks of the goodness that flows from his lady's mouth. The speech act itself is linked with the glance of his lady that produces healing and, ultimately, immortality for the pining lover. This healing power will be transferred to the poetic creation of Lady Esperance later in the text.

At this point in the poem, however, the poet still refuses to confess publicly his love to his lady. Silence is his way of repressing his feelings and presenting an outwardly acceptable appearance of chastity. He contents himself with composing poems of various styles that sing her moral and physical virtues. He goes on to complain that

Amours que j'en pri

[...]

Ainçoys a l'ottri

Qu'onc ne descouvri,

Dont maint souspir ay murdri

Qui puis n'orent mire.

Mais s'en mon depri

Met Amours estri,

Je n'en bray ne cri,

Yet there remains many consolations:

to remember,
or to imagine,
to see, to hear,
in sweet pleasure, his lady,
her noble mien,
the recollection
of the goodness that issues
from her speech
and from her sweet look,
whose glance
can preserve
and protect a lover from death.

N'autrement ne m'en deffri,
 Ne pense a deffire. (595, 606-14)²⁸

Love treats him roughly because she refuses to allow him to express his admiration of his lady. There is no physician able to heal the narrator's sighing. There is no one to hear and advise the suffering lover. He, like Marguerite, finds himself in an interspace between experience and speech. Both he and the Queen of Navarre record the presence of many sighs ("maint souspir"), and neither finds relief either from or in this murmuring sub-speech.

Whereas the sighs in Machaut's poem are the lover's attempt to ease his longing for reciprocated affection, Marguerite's narrator qualifies the murmurings as failed attempts to relieve spiritual suffering brought on by an outside force. Despite the fact that Marguerite's grief is initiated at the death of her brother as Machaut's is at the absence of his lover, the *Verbum* is the only source of true healing in Marguerite's poetic universe. She thus resanctifies the image of the lovelorn poet crying out in desperation to his lover by seemingly refocusing attention on Scriptural promises as the source of healing.²⁹

Recently, Rosanna Gorris Camos has noted the link between Marguerite's theology and the yearning for healing. The Word of God is the cure that can save "l'homme du péché universel, l'unique certitude émergeant du chaos du péché et des espoirs inquiets" (59). Others have highlighted the role of another form of sighing or whispering (the "souffle") as the interior

²⁸ Machaut, 201-2.

Love to whom I pray,
 [...] instead Love has granted
 that I never reveal it
 wherefore I've suffered many sighs
 that have found no physician.
 But if Love opposes
 my prayer,
 I do not wail or cry out,
 nor give vent to my woe in any other way,
 nor think of getting angry.

²⁹ She also inverts the gender structure of the love lyric. See my chapter on gender tensions for more detail.

voice in Marguerite's longer devotional poetry. Edwin Duval, for example, talks of the heart as the interior space where communication and communion take place. He says that spontaneous reactions are the only authentic communication in Marguerite's poetry. In fact, the heart is the "source de la prière, et de la poésie" (561).

In the *Chansons spirituelles*, these instances of sighing and murmuring of the heart are the meeting place of grace and sin and of flesh and spirit. The poems articulate an interior spiritual world that incorporates and transforms both the secular love longings of earlier medieval poets as well as the more pious aspirations Saint Paul expresses in his letter to the Roman Christians. He reminds his readers in Romans 8:26 that "[...] likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." This text, much beloved of evangelicals,³⁰ is the foundation of the association of prayer and sighing in Marguerite's work in general. Paul reveals that the Spirit of God is the One whose groans surpass the ability of human language to express them. One may not be able to count syllables or transcribe phonetically these sounds, yet they are also more profound than the spoken word. They move beyond what one can communicate through vocabulary and rhetoric. They are themselves experience. Often involuntary, they are movements of the inner soul that surface and are given voice. They paradoxically express for Marguerite more clearly what one feels and wants to say but cannot. The appropriations of the Spirit's work becomes a way of bridging the gap between the silence the poet should exhibit in the presence of God's Word and her need to speak about her experiences, between the loved object and her imperfect narratorial voice. Through these moments of quasi-communication, Marguerite subtly establishes a space for her own voice under the guise of allowing only the Scriptures to speak through her.

³⁰ C.f. *Gargantua*, ch. 40.

In a contradictory manner, the poems also rebuke those who would use such wordless communication to put themselves in God's place by questioning His will. Specifically, another of Marguerite's poems chides those who murmur against God's grace and present their own works as acceptable offerings guaranteeing their salvation. Differing from the sighs considered above, murmuring today means outright disapproval and complaint. However, its onomatopoeic roots point to the wordless nature of the complaints. Those who murmur do not quite come out and say what they are thinking. These murmurs are whispered, not fully voiced, complaints against what God has chosen. These whisperings of those who have a false hope of heaven highlight theological tensions between grace and works that figure prevalently in many of the *chansons*. The tenth song, for instance, compares those who would trust in their own merits to the older brother of the Prodigal Son who refuses to enter the feast celebrating the return of his wandering brother.

Si mon Frere qui est dehors,
 Oyant la musique et accordz
 Du festin de Paix et concorde,
 Se confiant en ses bras forts,
 Murmure et se courrouce alors
 De vostre grand misericorde,
 Laissez le louer ses biensfaitz :
 Mais moy qui voy les miens infectz,
 Et que par bonté paternelle
 M'avez tiré dessous ce faix,

Avecques tous les saintz parfaitz

Je vous en rends gloire éternelle. (49-60)

Using the story of the Prodigal Son as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, the speaker projects herself in the role of the younger son who squandered his father's wealth. Upon his return to the father's house, he finds mercy and forgiveness based on his belief in the goodness of the father.

Though Gary Ferguson exquisitely analyzes the development of the persona through the poem and highlights its highly allegoric nature, his discussion of these concluding stanzas of the poem focuses on elucidating the different elements of the hermeneutic tradition, such as identifying the older brother as either Jews or members of the Church who trust their own works (193-96). He does not specifically address the way the self-righteous communicate with God.

As opposed to the sighing, inner voice of a humble penitent yearning to know God, here those who are confident in the works of their flesh murmur against and deride God's great mercy. Murmurings in the mouth of the older brother who trusts his own deeds of charity instead of mercy to gain acceptance from the father also express an unfulfilled hope parallel to the believer who is seeking to experience God. He, like the mourning sister above, does not receive that which he earnestly desires because he is excluded from the festivities going on in the father's house. His inner voice, however, grumbles against the father. He hopes his own moral strength will earn him entrance into the celebration going on inside the father's house. The narrator of this poem concludes, on the contrary, that it is only those who recognize the filthiness of their own works who, by the Father's goodness, will be selected to share in Paradise with all the "saintz parfaitz." Those who murmur fall short of their desired end.

These half-spoken grumblings on the brother's part also point to key evangelical ideologies regarding salvation and grace. The one about whom Marguerite's poetic voice speaks is her "Frere" (49). The narrator still views him as family and, though she continues directly addressing the "Pere," makes an indirect appeal to him based on this bond. The brother is one who would question evangelical teachings on salvation as a sovereign act of God's grace.³¹ He remains "outside" the jubilant celebration welcoming the wandering child home.³² The murmuring of the brother here is opposed to the sounds of celebration that typify evangelical mirth. The self-righteous older brother, who hears the musical celebration of familial peace and understanding, is left out in the cold to praise his own good works. In the same way, the text subversively chides orthodox opponents of reformist-inspired teachings on grace who miss out on the freedom that comes from such salvation. According to evangelical theology, they are under the bondage of a works-based salvation and, thus, incapable of truly enjoying life (both here and in the hereafter). The narrator, on the other hand, realizes and points out the foolishness of such a self-righteous attitude. The true believer rejects any notion of her own participation in salvation. She sees that her own works are "infectz" (56). The older brother who is traditionally wiser and a more acute observer turns out to be incapable of enjoying the benefits of God's grace – namely identification with "tous les saintz parfaitz" (59) who participate in giving God "gloire eternelle" (60). Likewise, the learned doctors of the Sorbonne were keepers of knowledge and supposedly understood the deep truths of Scripture more than those whom they were teaching. Yet, evangelicals and Protestants charged that they missed the essential doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone and, accordingly, the accompanying joy.

³¹ As opposed to traditional Catholic orthodoxy concerning the cooperation between man and God in salvation.

³² For a similar phenomenon in Marguerite's theater see Hayes.

The older brother's murmuring is juxtaposed and opposed to the musical celebrations going on in the father's house and, ultimately, to the chorus of eternal praise surrounding the Heavenly Father's throne.³³ Comparing this wordless complaint with other instances of sighing in the *chansons* reveals another aspect of wordless communication and further highlights the positive aspect of sighing as opposed to the murmuring of the complainers. For example, at the end of Chanson 19, the narrator proclaims:

O Roy de tous les Roys
 Devant qui je souspire,
 Rien que crier je ne fois,
 Ne me vueille esconduire.
 [Refrain] O Toutpuissant oy la voix
 Du cœur plein de martyre. (28-31)

In a state of trust, the narrator finds herself in God's very presence. In this song, she contemplates the sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross to free her from the bondage and power of sin. The poem begins with a cognizance of her personal offense against God and the resulting state of damnation. Deserving hell, the narrator casts herself upon the cross of Christ and her belief in His word. As her realization and appropriation of this truth becomes more real in her heart, God elucidates His word in her heart, and tasting the sweet nut of Scripture

³³ A heretofore unmentioned interpretation of the brother in this poem could also be a refutation of those who take evangelical teaching to extremes and end by demanding an austere life bereft of joyful expression. Although Marguerite had harbored a young Calvin at Meaux, the two had a falling out after the latter departed for Geneva. They were at odds over the Queen's refusal to declare outrightly her allegiance to the evangelical cause and over the presence of spiritual libertines at her Nérac court. For a summary of the later disputes that arose between the two, see Thysell, esp. pp. 24-38. As the Genevan branch of the Reformed churches under Calvin grew more suspicious of Christian mysticism and those whom Calvin called "spiritual libertines," those in Marguerite de Navarre's circle exhibited more antagonism towards their Swiss "brothers." It is clear in this poem that, for Marguerite, at least one of the marks of true religion is the ability to enjoy life and make merry. The differences she had with those who held to more strict biblical principles are one more piece of evidence that the Queen of Navarre's religion was personal and individual. Her beliefs defy simple classification in one camp or another.

alleviates, if not quenches, her desire for truth. Then, finally, she is translated from her earthly state to a mystical scene in which God's presence is so real that she says she is "devant" the Almighty. The contrast between the silent sighing in line 29 and the voiced cries of a heart full of torment foregrounds another form of wordless communication that is quite different from either the quiet groans of the suffering sister or the muffled grumblings of the unbelieving brother.

From Murmuring and Sighing to Crying Out

Not surprisingly, the poem's narrator is at a loss for words when faced with the majesty of God's supremacy. That does not, however, mean she is silent. Though she cannot produce intelligible, logical language to express her rapture, she is still capable of sighing. Here the "souspir" takes on a more positive connotation than in the previous examples. Earlier the poet spoke of sighs that came from a heart full of grief at her brother's death and the under-the-radar murmurings of those who refuse to trust solely in God's grace for their salvation. In this poem, loss of words becomes a sign or proof of spiritual union with God. In order to highlight the inefficacy of words, the speaker repeats that she can do nothing but cry out.

Clearly, the idea behind the verb "crier" is Cotgrave's "to crie, skreche; hallow, shout; bray, hawle." This still inarticulate sound replaces the barely audible sighs of a grieving heart, and allows the poet to indicate an even more willful engagement in activity through the use of the verbal form of "souspire." These are no longer sighs that spring up uncontrolled from a mourning heart as in the poem where she mourns her brother's death (studied above). Here, the speaker is fully engaged in the action of not only sighing but crying out, adding, if not articulation, more volume and intensity to what she is expressing. As Michèle Clément states in her introduction to the *Chansons spirituelles*, these sounds are a "[...] parole irrépressible, 'loquela intérieure admirable' ou 'musique céleste', qui surgit pendant la prière. C'est cette 'loquela' qui définit le style de Marguerite dans les chansons" (43). These moments when the

normally quiet and subdued Marguerite pours out her heart point to the tension in her work as she tries to allow God to speak while also composing her own poems in her own voice.

This sound takes on the more animal-like sounds of screeching, braying, and howling that Cotgrave suggests as possible meanings of “crier” in other poems and indicates the extent to which she prefers a direct mystical experience of God to a more rational interaction with Him. For example, in *Chanson* 42, “crier” brings into focus another aspect of the poet’s experience of God that puts her on the fringes of orthodoxy. In *Chanson* 42, she says that

En lieu de te prier
Je ne fais que crier;
Mon parler n’a couleur
Pour monstrier ma douleur. (49-52)

Catholics maintain that the mass, at which communion is received, is an essential sacrament that permitted communication with God. The emphasis on community and the restraints a set liturgy places on worship limited such outbursts of rapture. Of course, private prayer is permitted; otherwise, there would be no mystical tradition. However, the clergy encourages the use of set prayers for the individual, and the growing popularity of the Rosary at this time evidences this tendency. They are not opposed to mystical prayer, but they do want to avoid the dangers of self-delusion. Crying out to God in the unintelligible manner Marguerite’s poetry evidences challenges to the limitations on what is and is not an acceptable means of addressing God outside prescribed liturgical prayer.

Later Protestant and Reformation leaders such as John Calvin share similar concerns, especially that the individualized nature of Protestant spiritual expression would lead to wild outbursts. Writing of the Spiritual Libertines, Calvin states that there are “certains esprits

écervelés [qui] pervertissent tous les principes de religion en quittant l'Ecriture pour voltiger après leurs fantaisies sous ombre de révélations de Saint Esprit [...] Qui tiennent L'Ecriture pour périmée et qui ne lui accordent qu'une importance secondaire, sous prétexte que l'Esprit continue ses révélations en dehors du texte biblique" (*Institution* 54).³⁴ Paralleling the Catholic appeal to the authority of the Church to temper and check self-delusion in mystical prayer, Calvin turns to the Bible to correct the problem of inappropriate or unacceptable self-expression. Spiritual excitement that is brought about through personal contact with the Holy Spirit must be tempered with the sound Biblical doctrine. Thus, there is an entire production of prayer books that help guide evangelicals and (later) Protestants while praying.³⁵ These books offer not only explanation of how to pray but also suggest texts for meditation before, during and after prayer. The purpose behind these books is to reign in individual expression and bring it in line with approved doctrine.

The experience of the speaker in Chanson 42, though, undermines the practice of such restrained communication with God. The grieving speaking in this poem resembles the mourning sister separated from her dead brother in Chanson 2. Here, however, the sinner bemoans the fact that her depravity prevents fellowship with God. She begins the song by complaining

Helàs, monseigneur Dieu,
De ton celeste lieu
Veu[i]lle scouter mes plainctz,
Car à toy me complains. (1-4)

Her discontent is not like that of the older brother referenced above, for she goes on to say that she is disappointed with the world and its inability to fulfill her desires.

³⁴ Book 1, chapter 9.

³⁵ For evangelical and Reformed examples see Brunfels; Calvin, *Writings on Pastoral Piety*, pp. 210-19 and *Opera Selecta*, pp. 10-1, 44-9, 58-9, 150-1; Béze, pp. 27-31, 68-71, 97-8, 120-3.

J'ay mis tout mon desir
 En richesse et plaisir,
 Et à l'ambition
 Est mon affection. (13-16)

Unable to find an answer to her quest for meaning and relief from the temptations from which she suffers (21-24), she asks God to pity her and to heal her before she dies.

Père doux et humain,
 Estend vers moy ta main
 Qui seule peult geurir,
 Ou je m'en vois mourir. (33-36)

At this point her suffering becomes so intense that she says she cannot even pray, and returning to the lines used just above to introduce this poem reveals the depth of her incapacity to communicate her need.

En lieu de te prier
 Je ne fais que crier;
 Mon parler n'a couleur
 Pour monstrer ma douleur. (49-52)

Instead of praying to God via one of the accepted prayers from the Bible such as the Our Father or one of the recommended texts by the Church Fathers, the believer in this poem cries out to God. She does not use the authorized means of communicating with God through coherent, rational speech. Instead she opposes the verb “prier” and the verbal noun “parler” to “crier.” The tenuous relationship between these words fittingly reflects the theological tension inherent in the Queen’s poems. There is a desire to communicate with God in a meaningful way

that is also personal. The use of words through prayer, at least in this poem, to accomplish such communication is not possible. The misery of the poet's condition before God ("La misere est en moy," 47) can only be expressed in the wordless communication she calls she ascribes to the verb "crier." Returning to Paul's idea that the Spirit's groans can express better than human words what she means, the speaker goes on to call on the Lord to speak for her ("Seigneur, respond pour moy" 54) because she cannot voice her own prayer ("Car je n'ay que la voix / Criant parmy les boys" 55-56). She finds herself out in the wild, outside of the bounds of human language and depending upon the transcendent communication of the Spirit that Paul references in Romans. The logic inherent in an organized prayer or in even speech ("mon parler") is too structured to evoke the anguish she feels over her condition. Yet, contrary to Paul's admonishment to allow the Spirit to groan for her, Marguerite's speaker continues to compose her poem in constant tension with the silence that she so longs for.

The speaker widens the distance between speaking and the meaning of the word "crier" in the next stanza when she states that

En ce terrible esmoy,
Seigneur, respons pour moy;
Car je n'ay que la voix
Criant parmy les boys. (53-56)

Less civilized, more animal-like characteristics of these cries begin to come to the forefront with this image. Further on in the poem, she actually refers to her soul as an animal.

L'ame vivant en moy
Me met en tel esmoy

Que je ne te puis veoir,
Ny croire, ne sçavoir.

Mectz à mort l'animal
Cause de tout mon mal;
Toy seul le peulx tuer,
J'ay beau m'esvertuer. (145-152)

She asks God to kill the animal within her that causes her so much torment that she cannot see God's truth. The logical restraints of grammar on speech are cast off in favor of a deeper spiritual communication. She finds herself incapable of making her plea for relief since she is so far removed from humanity at this point in her suffering.

In a different context, a similar point may even been seen in Chanson 2 (considered earlier in this chapter) when the speaker says that

Seul pleurer est ma contenance.
Je crie par bois et par plains,
Au ciel et terre me complains;
A rien fors à mon deuil ne pense. (45-48)

Here she is describing the grief she feels at losing her brother to death, but the pain is still portrayed with the same image. Both this poem and Chanson 42 refer to wailing in the "bois," that is outside of civilization and order.

This outside / inside contrast fits nicely within Marguerite's body/spirit dialectic. The only hope she has is for death to come and end her suffering on earth. For her, death is not separation as much as it is reunification. Once she dies, then her testing will be over, and she will

share “esjouyssance” with her brother (and/or Christ, depending on the context). Until that time, she is unable to express what she is experiencing inside. So, she is reduced to crying out in the forests and plains like a wild animal that has been struck with an arrow. Much like Virgil describes Dido’s wandering across Carthage after Aeneas has deserted her, Marguerite seems to be likening the anguish one feels over the loss of a loved one and the sinner’s aimless sojourning to that of a wounded animal.³⁶ In this way, these *chansons* act as a bridge by which Marguerite is able to communicate her individual experience of sadness as an inward phenomenon through the increasingly willful wordless acts such as sighing and crying out. Furthermore, as the poetic speaker distances herself from her experience, she becomes a disengaged subject, an independent being whose purposes are found within herself. She expresses a desire to escape the larger paradigm of despair which dominates her soul through death. The awareness that is physically aroused exists in tension with a scripture-based experience, which I now turn to.

Speaking Out and Staying Silent – *Sola Scriptura*

This theological tension in the *Chansons spirituelles* is expressed in the relationship between the Bible as a source of spiritual inspiration and the texts’ expression of a mystical experience couched in highly structured language of a physical author. Barbara Marczuk-Szwed argues that Marguerite’s mysticism does not contradict her strict biblical evangelicalism (9). Her analysis hinges on a definition of mystical as representing the mysteries of salvation hidden in the Scriptures. These truths are revealed in God’s Word by the Holy Spirit at the moment when the believer is in direct contact with God. Reading the Bible is an inherent presupposition to Marguerite’s mystical experiences as she transmits them in her poetry.

³⁶ Though Clément traces Marguerite’s image of a wounded deer in other chansons (see ch. 30) back to its Biblical source, it is highly syncretic. Virgil, for example, employs the metaphor in his description of Dido’s aimless wanderings across Carthage after Aeneas has abandoned her. See Virgil, pp. 202-3

In certain poems, the Bible is not only the departure point for the Queen's spiritual experience, the Word of God represents for her the essence of these experiences. Hence in many of the *Chansons spirituelles*, the highest form of these spiritual experiences expresses itself in the form of God's voice speaking. This spiritual progression paradigm is summarized in a stanza from Chanson 41, and all three steps depend upon God's voice speaking. The poet states:

Seigneur, qui congnois que je suis,
 Je n'ay voix pour à toy crier,
 Ny parolle trouver ne puis
 Qui soit digne de te prier;
 Toy mesme, Sire,
 Te plaise dire
 A toy ce que je dire doy,
 Parle, prie et respond pour moy. (49-56)

To begin, the need for penitential prayer as embodied in the verb "prier" corresponds to the *purgatio* stage while "parler" indicates an interaction and communication with God based on language and, thus, points to the *illuminatio* stage of the progression. This point of interaction is followed by a verbal response on the part of the speaker ('respond') and completes the trajectory to the *perfectio* stage in which the speaker is in dialogue with the divine. In fact, Clément points out the Biblical correspondence between this last line of the poem and Paul's statement in Romans 8:26 that "Nam quid oremus, sicut oportet, nescimus. Sed ipse Spiritus postulat por nobis" (236).³⁷ This is the same scripture that aided the understanding of the relationship between sighing and prayer in these poems. The speaker loses her voice, and the reader 'hears'

³⁷ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

God's voice communicating directly with the poet and/or the reader. The Word of God not only reveals His presence but also works to initiate, confirm and intensify the mystical union between the poet and the divine nature. Since it is the Lord who speaks, prays and responds, the Word of God constrains and frames this mystical interaction. Thus, the text synthesizes the study of Scripture and the direct experience of God through the intermediary of the *Verbum*.³⁸

Once again, the verb "crier" is used to transmit the sinner's efforts to communicate with God. Her's is a communication without "parole" because there is no logic or reason in fallen state. Her voice seems useless in this matter of communication. Her only hope is that the Lord will speak to Himself on behalf of the sinner. God's Word addressed to God Himself ostensibly removes the sinner's voice from the conversation.

One of the most important sources of theological tension in Marguerite's poetry emerges, however, when one considers the implications of what the poet claims in these verses. Inherent in her composition is the use of highly structured language. The rhyme, the consistent use of eight verses in each stanza, and especially the alliteration in the last verse all point to the presence of an author. The difficulty of reconciling the poet's active role in the construction of her verses and the renouncement of her voice presents a challenge to Marguerite's adhesion to the dogma of *sola scriptura*. It becomes impossible to remove oneself entirely from one's work. Thus, one might be able to argue that "[p]assant par le Christ et par la Bible, Marguerite ne partage pas la tendance visible chez plusieurs mystiques de l'époque à dissocier la mystique non seulement de l'étude historique, mais de la méditation doctrinale et morale du texte sacré" (Sommers 18). Considering the poetic framework that structures the *Chansons spirituelles* as well as the Queen's other poems makes it less tenable that Marguerite did pass solely through

³⁸ The divine inspiration of the Spirit of God is also evoked by the four time repetition of the plosive /p/ in the last verse of the poem. One can hear the Spirit moving in the exhalations.

Christ and the Bible when creating her work. There is also the hand of a human author that forces one to consider that the poems are works of tension and balance.

What Paula Sommers wrote of Marguerite's presence in her ladder poems ("As Marguerite the mystic strives for more adequate expression of religious experience, Marguerite the writer 'ascends' towards more complex forms of expression and textual organization") is even clearer in the *Chansons spirituelles* (17). The inaction and silence that the Queen so desires are the seminal essence of rational thought, planning and initiative that result in a text. Language as the quintessential expression of reason and planning is transformed into the predecessor of reason as Marguerite takes her experience, struggles with language in an effort to erase herself and finally ends with a highly structured, well-reasoned and thought-provoking piece of literature. The authority she wishes to exert over her creation can only be wielded through the masterful use of the language she so desires to avoid. As she uses words to create images of immobility, death and imprisonment, she creates a world that moves, lives and is free. The price she pays, however, is ownership of what she has engendered and at least a tacit negation of the bibliocentrality of her theology and the evangelical principle of *sola scriptura*.³⁹

Though Marguerite still allows the Scriptures to speak in her poetry, one often hears a mixed voice just below the surface of the words. Her paraphrases of Scripture simultaneously endorse its presence in her work and cloak the Word of God in the text of the poems. Robert Cottrell brilliantly calls attention to this theme when he talks of "[t]he conflict between composing autonomous texts while maintaining a Christian submission to authority" which "informs the problematic of writing in Marguerite's poetry and reflects a tension between love

³⁹ Thysell argues that Marguerite de Navarre differs from Calvin in his interpretation of the Bible since she places more emphasis than he on the role of the Holy Spirit. (See, especially, chapter 6 of Thysell's book.) As far as I can tell, the Queen always views the Spirit of God as illuminating and revealing truth to the individual through the Word of God. This does not mean that the Queen of Navarre does not adhere strictly to *sola scriptura*. Stating so would be, I think, a misinterpretation of Marguerite's intentions when considering her work as a whole.

for the creature and love for the Creator” (*Grammar* 307). The Queen’s poetic voice is one of a compromise between the conservative forces of Scripture and the emerging tendency to speak of and for oneself.

This struggle for authority runs throughout Marguerite’s poetry, and is often expressed by multi-layered images that at once define and blur the distinction between the poetic self and the divine other. Though the tension resides in the question of authority in the poems, it can also be expressed in terms of subjectivity since more often than not the two parties in a poem are a sinner/believer and God.

In one such example, the narrator of “Mon ame n’ha plus autre esgard” (Chanson 30) begins by admitting that

Mon ame n’ha plus autre esgard

Autre desir ny autre envie,

Fors de jouyr du doux regard

De la Vérité, Voye et Vie. 1-4

She immediately presents her soul as the would-be object of Christ’s loving gaze. Despite this seemingly humble objectification, however, the soul then turns to offer forty more lines describing *its own* suffering. Through a series of self-reflective representations, the narrator’s soul constructs itself as the subject of the images that follow the opening. In these figurative portions of the poem, Christ is transformed to the desired object and the soul serves as the desiring subject. The soul further blurs the distinctions between its role as object and subject while claiming to desire nothing but to be the passive object of Christ’s gaze and then proceeding actively to perform its own annihilation. Through linguistic and generic transformations, differences between the narrator’s ‘self’ and Christ flow in and out of one another. As boundaries

between subject and object are pixilated, determining unequivocal meaning in the poem becomes more difficult.

At first glance, the poem allows a traditional understanding of the soul as subject to the penetrating gaze of Christ. Such a cursory reading of the poem characteristically follows what Robert Cottrell terms Marguerite de Navarre's poetic paradigm of 'Marguerite-cum-Mary' (8).⁴⁰ Christ's glance activates the poem and serves as the soul's impetus to write (1-4). The desire to be desired motivates the soul to give voice to its yearning. Like Martha's sister Mary, the soul longs to sit at the feet of the Savior and lose itself in His gaze, and so the poem ostensibly develops along a path that moves from more to less activity. Throughout the poem, Marguerite employs several techniques to explore the inherent tension as the narrator-soul seeks to efface herself from her text and reveal God as the unseen *Other* and ultimate authority behind the text. Three images of Christ exemplify exactly what the true believer seeks in Him, coupled with three images of the seeking soul. Finally, the narrator declares that death establishes an eternal, mystical union between the believer and Christ (39-41) which provides the only resolution to the tension between creating a work of literature and submitting to the Creator of all things.

A series of similes sets up this progression. The narrator first sees her soul

Comme le cerf qui va courant,
Mordz de la couleuvre vilaine,
Au chauld du jour est desirant
De trouver une eaue vive et saine. (8-11)

⁴⁰ Cottrell argues that Navarre's poetry has the tendency to move from more to less active. He highlights the differences in the roles of Martha (as a busy servant of the Lord) and her sister, Mary, who is a pensive listener. See St. Luke's Gospel 10:38-42 for the Biblical account of the story.

Though commonplace in contemporary devotional writing, a wounded deer thrashing through the woods in an effort to find a cool stream can hardly be termed a “calm” image.⁴¹ Furthermore, the stag was also often read as an image of Christ. This potential double meaning of the image will add to the poem’s inherent ambiguity, as I discuss below. In this stanza, though, the soul busies itself with satisfying its own desire. In fact, the poem goes on to say that the soul ‘is running’ (14) toward Christ, the ‘true Fountain’ (12). The image points to vehement longing and the trials and tribulations of life. This is hardly the picture the New Testament paints of Mary quietly sitting at Jesus’ feet absorbing His teaching.⁴²

As if self-conscious of too much activity, the narrator employs a new simile in stanza III, and the soul is presented as a ship at sea seeking the sure safety of the harbor. The destination represents rest and peace, and is placed in opposition to the believer’s life full of ‘effort’ (15) and ‘tourmente’ (16). Once again, the precipitancy of life seems to crowd out any peaceful time of rest the soul may wish to spend in quiet communion with God. This stanza also prefigures the soul’s death as the ultimate cessation of worldly activity, but it is not until after passing through one more image that this desire is realized.

In this final simile, the soul exhibits likeness to a prisoner having the ‘apparence’ of death (23). By picturing itself as a captive desiring deliverance, the soul moves closer to its goal of passive contemplation during which God can speak. In contrast to the deer and the ship in the preceding lines, the prisoner is stationary in this stanza. She is trapped in the walls of her prison unable to move and “Est par grand desir ententif / De pourchasser sa delivrance” (24-5). As the

⁴¹ Though Clément traces Marguerite’s image of a wounded deer back to its Biblical source, Psalm 41:2, it is highly syncretic. As noted earlier, Virgil, employs the metaphor in his description of Dido’s aimless wanderings across Carthage after Aeneas has abandoned her. The use of such a mixed image would only add to the uncertainty and universality inherent in the poem as I discuss below.

⁴² Luke 10 :42.

soul moves closer to non-activity (death), it becomes more like Christ, and the final stanza reveals this truth when it proclaims that

Le doux regard de ton [Christ's] amour

Est un bien, sur tous desirable :

Il tue l'Ame sans sejour;

Et morte, à CHRIST la fait semblable. (36-39)

Thus, active, productive Martha loses her place to quiet, contemplative Mary. The soul returns to being the object of Christ's love. This first reading purports Christ Himself as the principal actor in the poem. The soul's goal is Christiformity, and the speaker passively longs to be desired by Christ in the complete inactivity of death.

This final state of rest, however, hints at another possible reading of the poem. For, though it appears that the soul enjoys peaceful communion with Christ, the final declaration destabilizes every conclusion the poem has seemed to reach to that point. In a burst of despair, the narrator reveals the non-existence of the experience described in the preceding lines. Exasperated, she cries out "Làs, avancez donc ce bon jour" (42) and, in so doing, alerts the reader to an underlying struggle between her desire and her reality and, perhaps, the most essential Christian dilemma – the desire for death and the requirement for living. A few lines earlier, she discloses that any repose comes only after the Lord's gaze has killed the soul ("Il tue l'Ame sans sejour" 38). If the soul desires to rest in Christ, why the violence? What needs to be annihilated if the poem's beginning words are true and the narrator's soul has no other 'esgard [...] desir [...] or] envie' than to enjoy being the object of the sweet gaze of Christ? The poem ends with unresolved tension and unfulfilled longing. In an ironic twist, the poem promotes not the calm rest one would expect to find in the Savior's bosom. Instead, the *chanson* unveils an

interplay between subject and object that simultaneously denies and exerts the idea of individual subjectivity in the text as played out in Marguerite's aesthetic struggle with textual authority that I would like to consider next.⁴³

Authority

In the Middle Ages, a text's authority was based on a pre-existent text. The medieval writer often borrowed his or her authority from writers who had come before. This is particularly true for theological writings (Dunn 8). The doctrine of Sacred Tradition clearly places authority in the hands of the apostles and subsequently the Church and its authorized *magisterium*. Those who sought to teach on spiritual matters were obliged to base their claim to authority on the doctrines and experiences of the giants upon whose shoulders they were standing. Otherwise, they were sure to face the punishment of the Church in an effort to shore up its own authority. This reliance on trained expositors in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of the divine word harkens at least back to Augustine. Michael McCarthy defends this claim by demonstrating that although Augustine held to the perspicacity of the scriptures, he also advocated the authority of expositors as "expert readers" (328-29).

Requiring the presence of such an external authority in a text added a layer of separation between the text and its author. In her discussion of the creative process in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Jacqueline Miller exposes the tension between authority and authorship this practice creates. She demonstrates that the concepts of authorial individuality (as opposed to the view of the author as an extension of past *auctores*) and the authority of individual authors began to co-exist with the medieval and classical understanding of the author (9-20). In essence, the need to base one's authority as a capable expositor of spiritual truth on past exegetes

⁴³ This is also a reference to the mystic's ultimate loss of self in God and the individual's loss of self in death. Cottrell and Sommers both deal extensively with the former in their books. I examine in more detail the latter in my chapters on gender (chapter two) and rhetorical tensions (chapter three).

threatens to diminish authorial creativity. Any authority claimed in such works is based on the authority of those the author cites. He (or she) is therefore subject to them and restrained by them. These more learned writers and commentators of the past demand obedience to their claims, for authority requires acquiescence if it is to be accepted. The past authorities serve as an external standard against which to measure the reliability of what a later author claims. These earlier authorities, in turn, look back to some greater authority in a cycle of passivity. External authority begins to cause authorship to disintegrate into silence as the author allows a previously established authority to speak through a given text. On the one hand, then, the boundaries of the past imply a certain lack of latitude in composition and expression. Yet, on the other hand, the existence of these confines and the possibility of transgressing them provide the material for carving out one's individual authorship. Adding one's voice to the on-going discussion of the scriptures becomes a balancing act of paying homage to the trained readers of the past while at the same time creating an individual work that sets itself apart from predecessors and precluded imitation by successors who would usurp any individuality claimed by the author.

Martin Luther is one of the first to challenge clearly this prevailing view of the authority of the Church's approved *magisterium* and to begin to establish the author as an individual self-endowed with a measure of authority apart from that of the Sacred Tradition. By espousing the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, Luther frees himself from the dogma of the Church as final authority for his work. He relies on the Word of God and his personal interpretation of it to authorize his work. As Peter Dunn argues, Luther advances the idea of "*private* self-authorization" by creating an "early modern rhetoric of self-presentation" in which "'author' and 'subject' become closely allied entities" (41 and 49). The self, working in conjunctions with the Bible, becomes the center of authority as the monopoly the Church had on the interpretation of scripture begins

to crumble. Evangelicals' deference to the Scriptures themselves as the final authority places the Word of God on a new plateau. No longer do the traditional teachings of the Church enjoy unmitigated authority. The author must rest on the foundation of the scriptures if he or she is to be granted acceptance. The liberating aspect of this change is that any individual can be the seat of authority. Any voice is valid as long as it is based on scripture alone.⁴⁴ Now the Word of God takes precedence over the word of man, yet the cycle of authorial passivity still exists. Constantly harkening back to the authority of God's Word renders the author powerless to contribute any statement of real value. The perfect author in this cycle is still silent, allowing only God's Word to speak. It is in this context of authority and authorship that Marguerite de Navarre finds herself writing the *Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses* (1547).

As an artist, she ponders what it meant to be an author and how much influence she could, or should, have on her text. As François Rigolot notes, "La reine de Navarre, formée à l'école du *Courtisan* de Castiglione, sait que le grand art est de faire croire à l'absence d'art: *ars est celare artem*" (69). Marguerite's evangelical conviction also poses a problem for the presence of her individual voice in her poetry. According to doctrine of *sola scriptura*, all human language is superfluous to the divine Word. Any exposition, such as those of Luther and Calvin's commentaries, must not claim any authority but that of Scripture. Just as in the Queen's view of art, the artist must hide, Marguerite ostensibly accepts this vision of the author as she notes in the first verses of the *Marguerites* :

Si vous lisez ceste oeuvre toute entiere,

Arrestez vous, sans plus, à la matiere:

En excusant la rythme, et le langage,

⁴⁴ This is complicated, of course, because then one becomes, in such a scheme, an authority only to/for oneself. Afterwards others will decide whether they think this is based on Scripture or not. Adherents to *sola scriptura* continually deal with this issue.

Voyant que c'est d'une femme l'ouvrage :

Qui n'ha en soi science, ne sçavoir,

Fors un desir, que chacun puisse voir

Que fait le don de DIEU le Createur. (1-7)

Of course, she is seeking to acquire the good graces of her readers in an accepted (and expected) formal self-denigration at the beginning of her text. She does so by stressing the inept quality of her own work as a transmitter of knowledge.⁴⁵ The Queen points the reader to God as the source of her inspiration. Any virtue of her work is a 'gift' from God, and she goes to great effort to excuse her own presence from her text.

Although this seemingly typical *captatio benevolentiae* shares much in common with her predecessors' and contemporaries' awareness of their presence in the text, Marguerite takes this line of reasoning one step further (or back). Whereas earlier medieval poets narrator comically regretted what others would do to the text *after* it was published and expressed concern that the author would exercise less and less control over it,⁴⁶ Marguerite expresses an uneasiness (that is anything but comic) about her very presence in her text on many levels. Furthermore, she calls attention to the tension and even interference the text itself represents in her soul's relationship to God. The meaning behind the text is what is important for Marguerite, and she wishes to remove

⁴⁵ More will be said about the feminine voice in the *Chansons* in chapter two dealing with gender tensions.

⁴⁶ In the *Roman de la Rose*, for example, Jean de Meun comically memorializes himself and Guillaume de Lorris as the authors of the romance, and François Villon ironically laments his passing authorial control in lines 753-60 of his *Testament* :

Sy me souvient bien, Dieu mercis,
 Que je feiz a mon partement
 Certains laiz, l'an cinquante six,
 Qu'aucuns, sans mon consentement,
 Voulurent nommer testament ;
 Leur plaisir fut, non pas le myen.
 Mais quoy ! on dit communement
 Q'ung chacun n'est maistre du sien.

herself from her poetry. Ironically, however, her “self” (under the guise of her soul) becomes the *matiere* of her poems as they trace her personal interaction with the Divine. She begs the reader to excuse the formal artistic components of the composition (“la rythme et le langage”), if possible, as he or she considers the true substance to which the letters point. The center-staging of the poet’s soul prefigures Rabelais’ *moelle* and Montaigne’s *matiere*. Just as these authors claim, in the former’s case, that readers must go beyond the surface language to perceive the hidden truth of the text and, in the latter’s case, that the elusiveness of self-discovery is the actual substance of the text, Marguerite’s struggle with communicating her inner thoughts and maintaining the appearance of removing herself and allowing the Word of God to speak through her constantly appears throughout the *Chansons spirituelles*.

This continual presence lies at the heart of the tension in Marguerite’s poetry, for in Marguerite’s theology, God is the only one actually capable of creating. He and His word represent the true *auctor* (the original source of her ideas – authority) and she is the *artifex* (the artisan who reforms and reformulates what she has gleaned – authorship). Authorship (the desire as an author to create in and of her own right and be seen as the owner of a given work) seems to be relegated to a negative standing in view of helping the reader see the gift of God at work in a text.

Such a dichotomy forces the author to question whether silence represents the consummation of authority or “the complete loss of it for the author whose medium is language” (Miller 30). Many of Marguerite’s poems explore this tenuous relationship between authority and authorship and attempt to close the gap between the two. According to some critics, consideration of this authorial tension reaches its most developed expression in Marguerite’s

Prisons – which was not published until after the author’s death (Sommers 83). The poetic ‘self’ of a mature Marguerite seems to erase itself in favor of a higher authority.

Challenges to Authority

Though this eradicated self is noted in the longer devotional poetry, the *Chansons spirituelles* portray a struggling poetic voice that is less sure of its place in the text. These texts create a space where this tension remains unresolved as the narrator’s soul finds itself struggling to reconcile its drive to use language to create and its desire to recognize God as the Creator. As noted earlier, a similar conflict to establish subjectivity is found in “Mon ame n’ha plus autre esgard” and leaves Marguerite indecisive and at a loss for words. This short poem exposes the internal tension between the author’s presence in the text and her desire to remove herself from the text. The narrator’s soul possesses a strikingly modern awareness of its simultaneous distinctness from and oneness with the Divine Author that undermines an unequivocal reading of the poem. A self-contemplating narrator makes the straight-forward construction of a simple and consistent subject impossible and personalized the notion of a single, universal authority.

To begin, even the technical and rhythmic patterns framing the poem highlight the blurring of boundaries between the soul and God. Each stanza measures seven lines in order to recall the perfection that Christ personifies. Merging with Christ Himself is the ultimate ambition of the narrator, her *nec plus ultra*. This visual reinforcement of the presence of Christ underlines the importance of the Divine Word and serves as a limit on any human language the poet would seek to compose. The physical form of the poem also highlights the narrator’s inability to consummate perfect union with Christ. There are but six stanzas; she does not reach (or is not capable of composing) the desired seven of divine perfection and completion. The efforts of man

as represented by man's number cannot attain the narrator's goal.⁴⁷ These physical features of the poem are traces of the interplay between competing levels of meaning in the poem.

Another source of instability occurs in the poem's use and reversal of medieval love lyric. The beginning lines of the poem are reminiscent of a troubadour singing the physical beauty of his lady. The poet would normally be so enthralled with his lady and her features that he would forget the rest of the world. As the object of his gaze, she would come into being on the page, and he would simultaneously desire her to look on him and grant him her favor. The words he uses to describe her would be the breath of life that gave her form and existence. Typically the *chanteur* sings the praise of his lady and expresses unquenchable desire to be with her. Marguerite's narrator, however, admits a nagging lack of attention and desire; instead of being the subject that desires, the speaker is the object of the "gentle gaze" ("doux regard") of Christ. The speaker is not, then, the expected *chanteur*. This role reversal subverts the anticipated pattern of the medieval lyric and invites a reconsideration of the poem's true objective.

Evolution in the lexical choices the soul makes to describe its lack of earthly desire intensifies the abandonment of a purely superficial interpretation of the poem. To begin, the soul dedicates itself whole-heartedly to no longer deliberating or paying attention ("esgard") to terrestrial matters. Then we see that it rejects all affection ("desir") and finally all lust ("envie"), except for Christ. The reader is plunged into an increasingly negative universe in which the soul denies all desires of its earthly life. As Georges Dottin notes, the soul doit s'évertuer à détruire la part terrestre d'elle-même avant de s'élever jusqu'au 'parfait désir' [...] (xix). This *via negative*, or way of privation, gives way to an acceptable object of desire. The speaker permits her soul to contemplate, desire and long for only the possibility of enjoying the "doux regard" of

⁴⁷ Six is the number traditionally associated with human imperfection. The Antichrist uses this number in an unholy trinity in Revelation 13:18 "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six."

Christ. By submitting itself to the Living Word, the soul is allowed to express its longings as a residue of the joy of being desired. As an author, Marguerite could only write in an effort to point others to God's Word. She, as a human and specifically as a woman, had no authority with which to speak. Though appropriate for a Christian writer, the fact that she casts herself as the object of the gaze of the beloved seems to reduce her authorial voice and legitimate presence in the poem. The self begins to disappear from the poem as it gives way to Christ's centrality.

At this point in the poem, however, the main concern of the narrator turns to the state of her soul. As noted above, stanzas II – V are concerned with the relationship between narrator and Christ, but they are dominated by similes that in large part describe her own soul and give a cursory mention to the supposed object of desire. Thus the presence of the narrator takes center stage. Cottrell's analysis of Marguerite's poems in general reveal that she was keenly aware of her presence in the text and that she was constantly engaged in a battle with the text to remove herself from it (307). More importantly, he notes that

[...Marguerite] had no desire to impress readers with an exhibition of linguistic virtuosity. Nor was she interested in the more specifically Renaissance notion of *enargeia* (also known as *evidentia*, *demonstratio*, or *hypotyposis*), which, at least as Erasmus described it in *De copia*, refers to an abundance of surface decoration designed to make the scene described more visually present, more concrete. Marguerite's poetry tends always toward a deconstruction of the visual, the concrete, the fleshy. Her landscapes are not of the outer world but of the inner world. The ultimate décor in all her poetry is the human heart. (236)⁴⁸

⁴⁸ I take up Marguerite's use of outer landscapes such as forest, sea and mountain to describe an inner one in chapter three on rhetorical tensions.

Similarly in this poem, far from being erased, the soul of the narrator takes great pain to describe itself and its own quest for relief. First as a deer, then as a wandering ship and finally as a captive prisoner, the self (as well as the author) makes its presence known and felt by the reader. The resulting images would seem to refocus the reader's attention on Christ, but it is only by passing through the reality of the soul that the reader arrives at Christ.

In the first image, the narrator's soul presents itself as a "un cerf qui va courant" (8). The narrator submits herself to Biblical language by borrowing an image from Psalm 41:2. The wounded animal seeks healing of the injury. The cure comes from the "vraye Fontaine" (12). Christ is the source of "une eaue vive et saine." The alliterative presence of [v] in all but two lines of this strophe remind the reader of the original presentation of Christ as the "Vérité, Voye et Vie" in the first stanza. Even in situations that can hardly be considered desirous, the narrator seems to place the emphasis on the Christ who incarnates all her desires.

Uncertainty arises, though, upon closer investigation. First, it is from the subject position that the narrator controls the development of the simile. The stag becomes the desiring agent, and the roles of narrator as the desired object of Christ's gaze and as a desiring subject flow back and forth into one another. The deer drinks of the living water that flows from the "vraye Fontaine" (11-2). Later returning to the image of Christ as a fountain in the fifth stanza, the narrator's soul comes to the understanding that He is a "Fontaine de Charité" that satisfies the thirst of His "serf" (29). Through a well-placed homophone, the narrator's soul has now become a "serf" instead of a "cerf." The soul is at once a free running animal and the slave of Christ. It has been domesticated and transformed into a willing servant. The self simultaneously desires and submits to Christ.

Furthermore, while the narrator identifies with Biblical language by employing the same simile structure from the Psalms, she does so in both an exemplary and universal *and* personal and anecdotal way. The image that would seem to paint the narrator's experience as a universal ideal to be pursued actually serves to confuse the boundary between the narrator's personal relationship to God and the general human condition. The first lines of the stanza compose an image of the universal sinful human condition, for the "cerf" is "mordz de la couleuvre vilaine" – that great serpent, Satan. Reformation theology places *all* humans in a *universal* sinful condition in stark opposition to God's holiness. She further identifies herself with "tous bons cœurs" who seek healing in Christ (13). Then, she personalizes the experience by declaring, "Mon ame court [to Christ] en esperant" (14). Suddenly the experience moves from one of extended application to a personalized anecdote. The process is repeated in the following two stanzas where she sets up a universal condition only to individualize it by concluding with a personalized reaction. She intensifies the individualization of her experience in the final simile where it is no longer the narrator's soul who runs or desires. The narrator herself makes an appearance. The subject position is at once extended to all of humanity and also limited to the individual thus complicating the notion of self and subjectivity.

As she seeks for some stabilizing representation of her relationship to Christ, allegorical representations slide into one another. As noted earlier with the transformation of 'cerf' to 'serf,' even the individual images have a tendency to slip into something else. In highly structured and self-conscious language, the narrator continues on to recount her desire to die (20). In place of the life it is currently experiencing, the soul hopes "de vivre que par le pain vif" (21).⁴⁹ The bread here fits nicely with Marguerite's understanding of the primacy of the Word of God.

⁴⁹ The bread is also a clear reference to the Eucharist. The one who seeks to become like Christ must die and by "mutation delectable," she begins to resemble that which she desires. In the same way, the bread becomes the body of Christ and is integrated into the believer's body.

Christ, the Living Word, proclaimed Himself to be the Bread of Life (*panis vitae*) in John 6:48. As such, He is the source of life and the ultimate fulfillment of all desire. Human efforts to arrive at salvation's "port" fall short. We see that the soul (as a sea vessel) makes its "effort" (15) to find "le désiré port" ("desired harbor" 17), but it is left longing. Desire begins to resurface in this part of the poem in the "désiré port," as the soul "desire la mort" (20), as it waits in prison "par grand desir" (24), and finally as "le desir d'un Coeur naïf" (28). The language of the poem reveals that the narrator's desire has once again become the main focus of the work.

As the narrator struggles with actualizing the negation and transformation of desire, Marguerite the author balances allowing the Word of God to speak through her while remaining absent from the text. The anaphoric use of "comme" at the beginning of the next three stanzas reinforce the presence of an author. We are thus forced to consider her voice and her perspective as we analyze the images she uses to describe herself in relationship to Christ. The metaphors used in stanzas two through four also highlight the presence of the author. Confusion between the language of the poem and the language of the Bible runs rampant as metaphors are mixed and expanded. Alliteration and repetition of key vocabulary all point to the presence of an author. Marguerite is the one motivating her poem by bringing words and images into existence.

As if she realizes that she has been too present, the narrator almost disappears completely from the last part of the poem. The central desire of her soul becomes to cease from working to earn salvation as the "nef fait son effort" (15). The rhyme of "seur reconfort" and "mort" in the central lines of the poem link her final comfort to her death. The last two stanzas work to erase and fulfill the desire of self-effacement so boldly proclaimed in the first lines of the poem, and it is not until the end of the poem when the announced subject of the poem "[m]on ame" is lost in nothingness of death in Christ.

Preoccupation with death reaches a new level in the fourth strophe where the narrator's soul compares itself to a "prisonnier captif,/ Qui n'ha que de mort apparence" (22-3). This prisoner wants nothing other than to be liberated. His spirit is absorbed "par grand desir ententif/ De pourchasser sa delivrance" (24-5). Deliverance is equated to eating the Living Bread (27). Taking the sacred bread leads to Christ being able to live His life through the narrator as she dies. To bring the idea full circle, the narrator highlights the "mutation delectable" in which she begins to resemble that which she desires. This "mutation delectable" can be Communion in which the bread becomes the body of Christ and is integrated into the body of the believer. It is also possible to read this experience as the words of Christ becoming part of the narrator's poem. Her voice is lost in His. The subject from which the text emanates and around which it revolves becomes a fluid merging of itself and the other. As the speaker loses herself in Christ, the reader finds it impossible to differentiate where Marguerite's words end and where Christ's begin.

This indeterminacy of meaning reproduces and draws attention to itself from the beginning of the poem. The rhyme scheme of first stanza links the words "envie," "vie" and "ravie." On the surface of the poem, this "vie" stands in opposition to the death that will become the only way to access it at the end of the poem. The idea of living beyond the here and now or the physical experience of the narrator reappears in the choice of the word "ravie" which has mystical connotations of being transported by ecstasy. Digging a little deeper, it is clear that this ecstasy is not as joyous as it would first seem. As the object of the gaze of Christ, the narrator loses all desire of her own. Her desire is to live the life of the One she adores. The "envie" is lost in the True "vie." The rhyme, however, continues to point out the narrator's own helplessness in the face of the *Tout*. Her ravished soul is linked to the life of Christ. "[R]avie" denotes, of course, extreme joy. The narrator's soul is raised to a new level of spiritual fulfillment as it loses itself in

Christ. This lack of temperance, however, is not always a pleasant experience, for included in the verb “ravir” is always a connotation of forceful removal or requisition of an object or a person. Cotgrave translates it as “to ravish, to snatch away hastily, pull away violently, take away forcibly, beare away suddainely.” The narrator may well end up joyful, but the process is one of pain and suffering. In it, the soul loses authority over itself because its voice is lost in the Word of God.

The poem begins with the “esgard” of the narrator’s soul, and it ends with the “regard” of the Lord. Now Christ is “desireable above all else” (“sur tous desirable” 37) because He encapsulates the incomprehensible “delectable mutation / When Nothing once again becomes Everything” (“mutation delectable/ Quand Rien en son Tout fait retour” 40-1) The All and the Nothing unite in Christ, and the narrator wants the “doux regard” of Christ to kill “l’Ame” and complete her journey to Christiformity (“Et morte, à CHRIST la fait semblable” 39). This submission is the result of an act of violence that makes the narrator like Christ.⁵⁰

What promises to be a soul describing its desire to be contemplated by Christ becomes a boundary-blurring dialogue that erases the limits between self and the divine other to whom it purports to point. The idea of authority and who has the right to speak in the text lies at the heart of this enigma. Marguerite’s theological construct of *sola scriptura* at once dominates and submits to her poetry. The image of the self moves from object to subject and back to object as it seeks to differentiate itself from and define itself in relation to God. Appropriating and manipulating pre-established poetic codes from the medieval tradition, the text creates a circle that further pixilates an already protean image of the self. Unable to resolve its true position in the poem, the soul is forced to accept the constraints placed on it from within and without.

⁵⁰ In chapter four, I discuss in detail the role of violence and spiritual and mystical annihilation in the *Chansons spirituelles*.

Ultimately, the soul fails in its attempt at complete unity with Christ, but this failure only serves to highlight a basic personal awareness of “self” in the poem and confirms the view of the idea of subjectivity as elusive, indeterminate and prone to conflict.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have catalogued two main theological tensions that recur throughout the *Chansons spirituelles* and reflected on their role in the text. It is clear that these tensions are an inherent part of the *chansons* and that Marguerite (like the society in which she lived) had not fully come to terms with competing doctrines. Rather than presenting a systematic outline of her own theological beliefs, the songs act more like a rough sketch of conflicting ideas with which the Queen was struggling. To recap, I began with a discussion of human nature and its relationship to sin and salvation. I considered this aspect of Marguerite’s theology through the lens of vocalization in her poetry and concluded that opposing relationships to God (as penitent sinner, as adoring worshiper, or as belligerent rebel) could all be expressed with the same verbs of sighing, murmuring, and yelling. All of these acts of making noise call attention to another source of theological tension in the poems. The text constantly struggles with the idea of Biblical authority by calling into question whose voice has the right to speak. While desiring to allow God’s voice to be heard through her and to point her readers to the Word of God, Marguerite finds herself unable to erase her presence from the texts. The poems simultaneously point the reader to God and to Marguerite. The imbrication of subject and object foreshadows modern apprehensions surrounding the relationship between author and text through the lens of the evangelical doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

Chapter Two – Gender Tensions

Introduction

Having considered the Queen of Navarre's heterodox challenges to religious authorities on both sides of some of the running theological debates in early modern France, I turn now to her subtle affront to patriarchal male dominance and misogynic tendencies. There have been several recent studies heralding Marguerite de Navarre as a proto-feminist. Generally centering around the role of women in the *Heptaméron*, these arguments hold up Oisille as the example of an empowered woman whose capable handling of Scripture demonstrates an unabashed equality with (or superiority to) her male counterparts in the collection of short stories and in the real world. She leads out in the day's activity by reading and expounding the Bible. In short, she ends up transmitting values and knowledge to the trapped pilgrims who gather around her. I would like to consider to what extent Marguerite's spiritual poetry promotes feminist ideas and paves the way for future writers such as Louise Labé. Paula Sommers has argued that the Queen's longer devotional poetry proceeds along a trajectory that ultimately negates gender in a search for absolute sexual freedom (109). By tracing the development of gender identity in these poems, Sommers notes a heavy feminine presence followed by a transition away from solely feminine guides to a group of guides – both male and female – whereby Marguerite subordinates both sexes to God and establishes their equality (108). The purpose of this chapter will be to demonstrate that the *Chansons spirituelles* not only establish this pattern but also go further by actually inverting orthodox gender roles and placing power in the hands of the female speaker. I will begin by considering the history of female writing up to the Renaissance and investigate the writings of religious women as a generally accepted avenue of feminine expression. From this perspective, I will analyze differences and similarities between Marguerite's form of feminism and that proffered by these other sources to determine the extent of the Queen's paradoxical

novelty and conservatism. She chose to live between two theological worlds (what one writer terms, “Ni Rome ni Genève”),⁵¹ and her expression of the tension between genders is no less complex. She reshapes literary and rhetorical *topoi* to achieve greater flexibility of feminine expression. In so doing, she quietly manipulates gender roles in order, ultimately, to subvert patriarchal hierarchy.

Towards a Definition of “Feminism” in the *Chansons spirituelles*

Examining the *Chansons spirituelles* through the lens of feminism is a fairly novel approach to the collection of poems. Generally, scholars have been concerned with Marguerite’s view of gender in her other works. The *Chansons*, however, are ripe with feminist reflections concerning the superior capacity of women (as opposed to men) to have a spiritual relationship with God and the relationship of a woman’s self with God. The construction of the personhood of a woman thus joins nicely with the idea of constructing literary authority I discussed earlier. Also linked to the pro-woman argument that Marguerite promotes in the *Chansons* are the ideas of subordination and submission – both of which also arose in the earlier chapter on the authority of the author. Of course, the term “feminism” itself is highly anachronistic when applied to the Queen of Navarre’s writings. I will employ it, however, in this chapter to refer to the pro-woman position normally associated in the sixteenth century with early modern writers who argued for the intellectual and moral equality of men and women.

In order to demonstrate the contemporary confines within which Marguerite was working, it is helpful to turn to Constance Jordan who highlights two instances of “feminism” present in sixteenth-century thought. The first would hardly be classified as a feminist position

⁵¹ For a detailed account of the balancing act the Christian humanists in France carried out, see Wanegellen. He argues that the area of Meaux promoted a fluid doctrine that neither rejected Catholicism nor fully embraced the ideas of the Reformed church.

today because it maintains that woman is ancillary to man. Jordan qualifies the view as feminist simply because women are not seen as *inferior* to men. Their position is elevated due to their virtue. They are not beneath men, but their equality is contingent upon the fulfillment of duties as assigned to women in general. Though she is not subordinate in position to man, she continues to perform the distinctly feminine obligations she has as a woman, and she deserves honor and respect because of this. The second contends that women, once educated, ought to play a valid and vital part in society as a whole. Society should not limit their roles to the domestic sphere. Rather, women and men should share political and economic responsibilities (13-14). I will argue that the *Chansons spirituelles* offer a feminine voice that speaks from a modified version of the first instance of Jordan's two types, though the second is not altogether absent from the work as the poems subversively challenge male hegemony.

That the idea of "écrire au féminin" is even present in the *Chansons spirituelles* is a question that has yet to be addressed by scholars. It is, however, extremely important to establish that these poems, though first and foremost devotional in nature, also subversively challenge the severe patriarchal authority often pervasive at the time Marguerite was writing. She was aware that her decision to write and to publish was an act of defiance in the face of the male-dominated literary world. In the opening lines of the *Marguerites de la marguerite des princesses* (in which 32 of the 47 *Chansons* first appeared)⁵², the Queen addresses her reader:

Si vous lisez ceste œuvre toute entiere,
 Arrestez vous, sans plus, à la matiere:
 En excusant la rythme et le language,
 Voyant que c'est d'une femme l'ouvrage:

⁵² Abel Lefranc discovered the remaining songs, still in manuscript form, and edited them in 1896.

Qui n'ha en soy science, ny sçavoir,
 Fors un desir, que chacun puisse voir
 Que fait le don de DIEU le Createur,
 Quand il luy plaist de justifier un cœur. (1-8)⁵³

In these opening lines, she takes a step back from her work since these paratextual verses lie outside the main body of the collection. In this way, the dedicatory letter invites the reader to conclude that the author is aware of her presence in the text. She is conscious of the fact that she is composing and creating what will follow.

This is a tenuous position for Marguerite to occupy since there is great danger from a theological perspective in the creature taking the Creator's place. Due to their spiritual emphasis, the *Chansons* provide an ideal space for Marguerite to explore the tension between her identity as a woman and what that means for her poetic voice. Mirroring the theological discord between establishing her authority as a writer and abiding by the *sola scriptura* principle discussed in chapter one, Marguerite questions the worth of what she writes and its simultaneous and contradictory validation implies that the reader must look beyond the words on the page and look beyond the words of the text itself to discover their message. She names God, of course, as the ultimate source of her creation and asks the reader to excuse her writing, remembering that it is, after all, by a woman. The reader is encouraged to look outside the confines of the printed letters and physical features of the poems. In this way, the preface – simultaneously within and without the text – paradoxically calls on the reader to respect and to go beyond boundaries within the text proper.

⁵³ Chapter one discusses the important theological implications of these lines.

One of the most significant boundaries the letter to the reader concerns itself with is that of gender.⁵⁴ Marguerite seeks to gain her public's approval by engaging in the accepted self-denigration that accompanies literary works – *captatio benevolentiae*. She takes her place in a long line of male predecessors by beginning her manuscript with a warning of its inferior quality, and she enjoins her reader to overlook any faults and to dig for the deeper truths ('matiere') hidden amidst the scribbling of "une femme [...] qui n'ha en soy science, ny sçavoir." She proclaims that her book is worth reading because it contains something that reflects the glory of God and not because of her skill as a writer. In so doing, she mediates a place for her work in the public's eye. She claims authorship (i.e. equality with her male counterparts). Then, she reverses herself and reminds the reader that this author is also unlike her predecessors precisely because she is writing from a woman's perspective. As I will demonstrate, this tension continues to figure prominently in the *Chansons* and serves as a good definition or example of Marguerite's genre of feminism.⁵⁵

Misogynous Theology and the Status of Women in the Renaissance

Even daring to write and publish a work that could be classified as theological was an affront to a hegemony that placed women in a lower class than men. This theological subordination carried over from a perceived biological inferiority that had been present since antiquity. Aristotle, for example, saw females as "defective" males and a "monstrosity" of nature. They were from the beginning of Western society a subordinate class of humanity.

⁵⁴ Anne R. Larsen in her article, "'Un honneste passetems': Strategies of Legitimation in French Renaissance Women's Prefaces," suggests that Marguerite's dedicatory letter expresses "the social and religious purpose of her work [...]" (16). In her short analysis, Larsen highlights the paradox of Biblical servanthood that Marguerite employs throughout the preface and sees it as supporting the spiritual tenor of the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (which is the first work in the *Marguerites*). Though I strongly endorse the overall religious nature of the *Miroir* (and of the *Chansons*), for the purposes of this chapter, I emphasize the Queen's insistence on her gender and see it as informing the rest of the text at some level.

⁵⁵ Scholars have referenced feminine writing in the dedicatory letter. However, there are no studies that thoroughly treat the gender issues at play throughout the poems as a whole. See, for example, Larsen's article noted above as well as Natalie Zemon Davis's article "Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France."

Furthermore, due to their womb (*hystera* in Greek), they were more likely given to hysterical excess of speech (gossip and deceitfulness) and sexual desire (lust). Continuing this physiologically based subordination of women, medical practitioners in the sixteenth century reminded readers that the female's wet and cold humors caused her fickleness and deceitful tendencies. Her womb ruled her body and required regular feedings through sexual intercourse or pregnancy to keep it in line. The woman who did not give in to the desires of her uterus would go insane, hence the medical justification used in support of the belief that females' innate tendency would lead to excess and disorderliness.

Medieval Christian doctrine often continued to denigrate women based on theological, as opposed to biological, reasons. Shelia Fisher and Janet E. Halley note that though theologians theoretically held that men's and women's souls were created equal, this belief was not put into practice. As evidence, they point to sermons and other writings regarding a woman's pre- and postlapsarian inferiority (2). Many writers supposed that Eve was created smaller and younger than Adam (Lazard 11). Since God created her after him and from his side to be a "helpmeet," the Church taught that Eve was inherently inferior to him. Her divinely ordained and natural submission to her husband antedated sin's entry into the world, whereupon it became an indicator of and punishment for her degenerate nature. Proof texts included classically interpreted passages from Paul in which he stated that woman is made for man's glory just as man is made for God's and that wives should submit to their husbands as the church yields to Christ.⁵⁶

Misogynous interpretations of Scripture continued through the Middle Ages and early modern period with specific emphasis on Eve's role in the fall of the human race. Her

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and Ephesians 5:22-4.

predisposition to sin and deception was said to make her an especially useful tool in Satan's armament. As daughters of Eve, women were also ill-suited for political and social leadership (Fisher and Halley 2). Madeleine Lazard points to the establishment and expansion of new preaching orders and their inflammatory sermons in the thirteenth century as a vehicle for "la peur et le mépris de la femme" (12).

The most influential preachers denounced female vices such as gossiping and, most importantly, an insatiable sexual desire.⁵⁷ For example, the early sixteenth-century Franciscan Michel Menot (whose recorded sermons date from 1508, 1517 and 1518) reminds his listeners that trying to meet women's desires had led to the downfall of many good men. He states in his sermon on the Prodigal Son there are many "prebstres qui ont tant de biens d'eglise, et ce pendant, en fin d'année, ont debtes pour reste, veu que tout est despendu pour des femmes et pour complaire a leur ventre" (39). Women are the source and the vehicle for men's destruction. To justify the silencing and domination of women, he goes on to cite Jacob's daughter, Dinah, as an example of "le mal [of greed] qui aduint de son viol" (39). According to Menot, rape (the ultimate domination and silencing of women) is a just result of their lasciviousness.

In another sermon, he denounces the vices of Mary Magdalene before her conversion and mentions the fact that "c'est une grande beauté de corps qu'elle avoit. Il sembloit qu'elle fust faicte pour regarder [...]" (51-52). Her seductive power over men actually led them into sin, and it did not help that "elle vivoit à son plaisir, et faisoit des banquets" (51-52). The sermon fragment we have concludes with Mary's appropriate reaction to Christ when she throws herself "a terre comme ung chien" (57). Menot encourages his listeners to reply to Christ in like manner. Such a link between women in general and Mary Magdalene compared to a dog dehumanizes

⁵⁷ Lazard makes mention of Michel Menot and Olivier Maillard among others.

women and relegates them to the status of one of the lowest and most domesticated of animals. Following this line of reasoning, silence and obedience become the correct responses for those women who recognize their corruption and their tendency to sin.

As the Protestant Reformation gained ground, women may have been offered a glimpse of hope given the emphasis on all Christians reading and discussing the Word of God. In fact, some Catholic writers went so far as to proclaim it a religion of women and to infer that its successful spread in Europe was due to the unstable nature of women's character.⁵⁸ In her study of the role of women in religious change, Natalie Zemon Davis mentions the positive portrayal of women in popular Calvinist literature as one point of attraction for women to the new religion ("City Women" 77-80). She also points to the famous example of Marie Dentièrre as an outspoken woman who defended the Bible and publicly challenged those who opposed its teachings in Geneva in the 1520's (82).

Despite later Reformed thinkers who encouraged both men and women to read and comment on the Bible, at the time Marguerite was writing women were still relegated to silence when it came to the public proclamation of God's Word. Genevan pastors and leaders made frequent references to Paul's admonishment that women should learn in silence in church services. This submission to male authority also extended to the home. Though a certain value was placed on marriage and the woman's role in the home, "ni Luther, ni Calvin ne remettent en cause la sujétion de l'épouse à l'époux, car la faiblesse de la nature féminine leur inspire les mêmes soupçons qu'aux catholiques" (Lazard 15). Zemon Davis points out that Pierre Viret instructed women to avoid speaking out in church and to content themselves with teaching

⁵⁸ See the jurist Florimond de Raemond's *L'histoire de la naissance, progresz et decadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle*. (Rouen, 1623).

schoolgirls or their own children at home (“City Women” 83). The fact that more women than men were called before the consistories also indicates that church leaders thought them more susceptible to being led back to Catholic practices and, thus, more in need of restraining measures when it came to public discourse.

Secular works also described women as best fit for a subservient and quiet position. Written toward the end of the sixteenth century, Béroalde de Verville’s *Aventures de Floride* (1594) was a moral guide for women. Notwithstanding the urgency with which the author pleaded for women to avoid engaging the public sphere, he is counted among the “défenseurs [...] zèles de la cause féminine” because of his dedication to equal access to education for women (Zinguer 69). In a side text that accompanies the *Aventures*, Béroalde dedicated a short letter to Madame Charlotte Adam, dame de la Valière in which he enumerated the proper sphere of influence for an educated woman. Though this text appeared after Marguerite’s death, it sheds light on contemporary beliefs among proto-feminist thinkers concerning women’s public role.

In this short letter, Béroalde argues that women should be taught to read and suggests that women read books that encourage good behavior and morals rather than those which under the guise of good actually contain evil teachings (Zinguer 82). As a proponent of educating women, one would expect that he would encourage them to use their knowledge and learning for the betterment of society and for the public good. This, however, was not the case. Instead, he promoted the idea that educated women are actually more docile than those without learning. In his opinion, “Plus une Dame sait, plus elle est habile, plus elle est habile, plus elle est sage: plus elle est sage, moins elle est présomptueuse: et moins elle est présomptueuse, plus elle est agréable, humble et honorable” (82). For even one of the most progressive male thinkers at the

end of the sixteenth century, it seems impossible to expect even educated women to take part in public dissemination of knowledge.

For most men the goal of empowering women with knowledge was not to make them engaging and active participants in public affairs. They were to be examples and teachers to other women “afin que les autres par une sainte envie deviennet telles” (83). Women’s instructional influence is extended to males only when they are children and to the extent that it glorifies men’s position as children of “celles qui sont sages et scavantes” (85). Despite his claim that “la femme est le chef d’oeuvre de Dieu,” educating women, for Béroalde, actually reinforced the patriarchal ideas regarding the proper place of women in the home, in the church and not in public life (83). It is not surprising, then, that “Renaissance feminists spoke of powerlessness and objectification, but they tended to see the wretched condition of women as the consequence of the moral perversion of men, who failed to live up to the challenge of being fully human” (Jordan 9).

In fact, this seems to be one of the fundamental struggles facing female writers when Marguerite was composing her *Chansons spirituelles*. Women writing in the sixteenth century were heavily influenced by the Boccaccian tradition which, though dialogic in nature, often favors the male voice. Contemporary female authors struggle to “develop the female point of view more extensively, sometimes subverting the message of compliance with male desire, which they inherit from the *Decameron*” (Bauschatz 55).⁵⁹ Hélisenne de Crenne (*ca* 1515–60), for instance, is one of the first to propose a more authentic female voice. Though scholars are still debating the actual existence of the woman “Dame Helisenne,” the work attributed to her

⁵⁹ For a concise summary of women’s writing in France from the Middle Ages through the twentieth century, see Stephens. Specifically for the Renaissance, Bauschatz’s chapter.

undeniably claims an authentic female voice.⁶⁰ *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours* (1538) portrays a woman speaking to other women. Though her protagonist finishes by instructing women to remain faithful to their husbands at home since adulterous relationships bring only pain and suffering, the semi-autobiographical nature of the text reflects a more refined and truly feminine voice than do its predecessors.⁶¹ One of the key lessons Hélienne's work brings to light is that women construct their own authority to speak about themselves and about their own struggles through the act of writing (Chang 140).

Concern with women's ability and prerogative to speak publicly also distinguished the work of Pernette du Guillet (1520–45) and Louis Labé (1520–66). These two poets actively challenged masculine hegemony in the public arena and more clearly defined the idea of *écrire au féminin*. Pernette's *Rymes* (published posthumously in 1545 by her husband) advanced the idea of female equality by manipulating and reversing male-female relationships that dominated conventional love lyric. She allowed the usually silent female objects of adoration the ability to answer their admirers. Though she followed Hélienne's example by extolling the "feminine" virtues of chastity and modesty, critics have noted that she did so in a way that implies "more equality in the relationship between" her male mentor (Maurice Scève) and herself (Bauschatz 51).

Although Louise Labé also transformed traditional courtly love poetry, she empowered women in her poems by casting them as the desiring subjects and muting their male counterparts.⁶² She directly responded to the question of a woman's place in society in her *Débat de folie et d'amour* (1555) where she pointed to herself as an example of the leadership and

⁶⁰ On Hélienne's identity, see Chang (especially pages 139-174), Nash, and Wood.

⁶¹ Bauschatz refers to Boccaccio's *Elegia de Madonna Fiammetta* (1343-4) as the model for Hélienne's *Angoysses*.

⁶² Though there is some debate, most scholars agree that Louise Labé is a historical woman and deny Huchon's thesis that she is a literary creation.

intellectual contributions a well-educated woman could provide. She deftly demonstrated her own erudition of both classical and contemporary sources. Furthermore, she encourages women to inform themselves and take part in public debates with men while stressing the unique bond of women with one another (Bauschatz 53). In fact, in the *épître dédicatoire*, Louise frames the entire contemporary humanist movement in gender terms by arguing that it is educated women who should write and establish a new feminine authorial identity that is distinct from the dominant masculine one (Rigolot “Préface” 8).

Religious Writing by Women

Unfortunately, male-dominated authorities in the sixteenth century continue to marginalize Pernette and Labé’s views on women’s participation in the public social sphere. However, as evangelicalism increases its influence in the argument concerning the relationship between the sexes, Protestant women begin to express themselves more freely in public religious discourse. This is particularly true as the debates surrounding predestination and the nature of the human soul infiltrate the *querelle des femmes* that had been raging since Christine de Pizan wrote her defense of women in response to what she perceived as the anti-woman stance of Jean de Meun’s continuation of the *Roman de la rose*. In the sixteenth century, the *querelle* incorporates more religious overtones and language, and it becomes increasingly evident that early feminists saw a link between the Protestant emphasis on sincere expression before God and the freedom of women in general.

To express this newfound agency, female theologians (just as their counterparts in the social sphere) first had to overcome the obstacle of male hegemony in the arena of spiritual instruction. History is replete with men writing both religious and social etiquette manuals for women. For example, Elizabeth Robertson analyzes a text written by a man for a group of

women, the *Ancrene Wisse* (early 13th century). She concludes that though it encouraged women's spiritual development, it is a gendered text that exposes the author's prejudices against women – especially concerning the sinful nature of their bodies. The highly didactic and circumscribing nature of the text limits, rather than expands, a woman's spiritual experience. Furthermore, its focus on the personal application of spiritual practices in daily life reinforces societal norms concerning the role of women in spiritual as well as social and political matters. Robertson finds that generally "[m]ale contemplatives are encouraged to leave earthly experience behind, whereas female contemplatives are to be made always conscious of their rootedness in inherently sinful bodies" (126). This genre of manual, even though ostensibly liberating, tends to reinforce traditional roles for women and constrict their participation in theological debate.

Women, however, did manage to carve out a niche for their voices to be heard on spiritual matters. In fact, there is a large corpus of work by female mystics that predates the *querelle* and evangelicalism. Medieval mystics and nuns composed many spiritual treatises under various circumstances. Some were itinerant-like preachers who wandered from place to place proclaiming a spiritual union with God. Others were confined to convents, and their voices are heard through their own pens or via the conduit of a (generally) male scribe. Despite an incomplete record, it is possible to begin to describe the emergence of a feminine theological voice through their writings.

Hildegard of Bingen⁶³ (1098-1179), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1297) and Julian of Norwich (1343-1416?) were three such women whose circulated work not only advanced the

⁶³ Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples participated in the editing and publication of several works promoting monastic writings and devotion. Particularly, he worked on the *Liber trium viorum et trium spiritualium virginum* (1513) in

idea of female equality with males but also challenged established male hierarchy.⁶⁴ They, and others like them, created a feminine spirituality that was outspoken and independent, despite the contemporary limits society placed on women engaging in theological matters. Their shared belief that union and intimacy with God were not only possible but also desirable and accessible to females overcame the limits of silence and submission. Though they often directly challenged male leadership,⁶⁵ their most enduring contribution was the establishment of an arena for women to take part in theological debates and to construct spiritual systems of thought and experience. Furthermore, they also used a uniquely female language to describe their religious experiences.⁶⁶ Of course, these women were still marginalized by the Church's stance against female preachers. They refuted the dominant prejudice against women as carnal, lusty instruments of Satan insisting upon a vital role for women in religious discussion and redefining what it meant to be female in their society.

Other more contemporary women also managed to formulate a specifically feminine voice in their devotional writing. Though the official church position still denied female authority in spiritual matters, Gillian Ahlgren notes that during the sixteenth century as the influence of evangelicalism expanded across Europe, personal revelation also increased in importance. She states that "[s]ince the source of women's authority was external revelation or reflection on experience, and since it rested on a charismatic gift, it had to be examined for validity [as did that of male mystics]. As attitudes toward revelation changed, so inevitably did

which the life of Hildegard of Bingen is offered as a suitable example for women (and for all those engaged in a monastic lifestyle as well as clerics). For a detailed account of Lefèvre's involvement, see Reid, pp. 130-1.

⁶⁴ Frances Beer conducts an in-depth study of each of these three women in her book.

⁶⁵ Concerning Hildegard, see Beer, pp. 20-1 describing her confrontation with German king Frederick Barbarossa over the election of a new pope and her condemnation of his stand. Pages 82-3 briefly cover Mechthild's open critique of clerical corruption and greed that led to the burning of her books. Though considerably more recluse and less direct than the other two, Julian's visions and writings that promoted the unorthodox view of God as Mother is, perhaps, one of the most serious challenges to established patriarchy among the three writers. See pp. 151-7 for a detailed analysis of her construction of the motherhood of God.

⁶⁶ See Bynum.

the authority of women's voices" (Ahlgren 21). One of the most renowned of these emerging feminine voices, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), lived at the same time as Marguerite de Navarre and is of particular interest due to her similarities with the author of the *Chansons spirituelles*.⁶⁷ In particular, Teresa's "rhetoric was self-conscious, alternatively defensive and affiliative, and above all subversive; it allowed her to break the Pauline silence" (Weber 16). The saint's writing reflects "covert strategies of empowerment" as she embraces "stereotypes of female ignorance, timidity, or physical weakness" in order to argue that such traits were precisely what God favored and desired in all people – male and female – thus inverting the dominant teaching that women should seek to be more masculine (Weber 15 and 36).

Despite Teresa's extremely rapid canonization in 1622, contemporary Church authorities in the Spanish Inquisition refused to release her books for thirteen years. She was ordered to burn some of her Biblical meditations in 1580, and even after her death, as late as 1589, theologians recommended that all her books be burned. Thus in the Renaissance, many still believed that women could write on spiritual matters as long as they did not seek to have their work published. Giving the public access to a woman's private ideas "est une transgression, c'est manquer à la pudeur féminine, au devoir impératif de modestie et de silence qu'on attend d'une femme de bien" (Lazard 234). In an effort to ease their way into a forbidden arena, women often dedicated their work to another woman or used a pseudonym or anonymity to protect their reputation. In fact, Marguerite's first edition of the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* was published anonymously. They were also particularly careful to underscore the inherent inferiority of a woman's writing as has been seen in the dedicatory letter to the *Marguerites*.

⁶⁷ Saint Teresa did not have access to Marguerite's texts, but she does demonstrate the kind of spiritual writing that was published by women at the time Marguerite was composing and publishing her *Chansons spirituelles*. Her most important works include her autobiography and *The Way of Perfection* (both written before 1567) and *The Interior Castle* (written in 1577).

Feminism in Marguerite's Other Writings

Marguerite accordingly took her place among these female devotional writers who opposed themselves to anti-woman rhetoric by publishing on religious themes despite apostolic admonishment against their participation in such matters.⁶⁸ She has even been heralded as an initiator of “feminine” writing. Madeleine Lazard states that,

Marguerite, figure de proue de la littérature féminine à l'aube de la Renaissance française, est apparue comme la messagère de l'épanouissement culturel que le royaume allait connaître. Mêlée très près au mouvement des idées et des lettres, aux luttes politiques et religieuses de son temps, elle symbolise tous les espoirs, les progrès et les échecs de la Renaissance. Le prestige moral et intellectuel de cette personnalité complexe, ses qualités exceptionnelles d'intelligence et de cœur devaient contribuer à rehausser l'image de la femme et encourager la créativité féminine. 281

Any discussion of Marguerite de Navarre's feminism must begin with Patricia Francis Cholakian's cataloguing of a feminine voice in the *Heptaméron*. In her book, *Rape and Writing in the Heptaméron*, Cholakian investigates how the short stories “interact at the structural level with the narrative conventions constructed by men's fictions about gender relations” (5). The critic considers the short stories constructed around rape and/or seduction and argues that it was necessary for the Queen to “subvert symbolic thought” to transmit her feminist point of view (15). Marguerite accomplished this goal by using the rape scenario to subvert patriarchal linguistic and fictional paradigms. The right of the female narrator to name herself as subject derived from her right to defend herself from male aggression. Marguerite transmitted her

⁶⁸ Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 specifically concerns properly not teaching in assemblies. Some women argued that there was no prohibition against teaching in other venues. Because some of Marguerite's songs (or versions thereof) eventually do end up being published in Protestant hymnals, their public nature would imply somewhat of a voice for Marguerite in the public arena.

message of female empowerment, in terms of a woman's right to speak out and tell her story, by unmasking the "masculine plot" of seduction and revealing it as a violent act. Cholakian concluded that Marguerite's insistence on female honor as a "woman's right of inviolability" can be read as either a reinforcement of traditional roles for women or a signal of "women's right to choose on their own terms a life independent of male domination" (219-20).

Continuing to consider the didactic nature of Marguerite's writing, Colette H. Winn later describes three main axes of Marguerite de Navarre's instruction on femininity ("De Mère"). She traces the development of instruction in the domains of love, morality and religion, and found that the Queen's plays, short stories and longer devotional poetry served as a sort of *journal intime* that a mother would give to her daughter to transmit her own individual sufferings. The diary documents "[...] un être qui souffre dans son corps tout en s'efforçant de se dominer pour obéir à sa foi et se soumettre à la volonté de Dieu" ("De Mère" 81). Winn sees the instruction that women give to other women as generally supportive of the patriarchal system. In her view, Marguerite was preoccupied with a "recherche de la perfection plutôt que la revendication des droits féminins, entreprise nécessairement 'sujette à l'imperfection'" (81).

John Parkin examines this aspect of Marguerite's feminism from the perspective of humor in the *Heptaméron*. Rather than arguing for female vindication, he concludes that Marguerite valued an equality between the sexes as played out in the verbal exchanges between the *devisants*. Though these interlocutors remain spiritually united, divisions arise when one considers the moments in which they laugh at and with one another. Through the use of different laughter-evoking techniques, the men and women pit themselves against one another in two clans wherein they take turns denigrating one another. Parkin exploits the use of "suggestive rather than penetrative satires" as a particularly feminine gendering of the *Heptaméron*, and

points to its use as a device whereby Marguerite defends the female sex and highlights the deficiencies of men (62). Ultimately citing the Queen's religious convictions concerning the common fallen nature of all humans, he reminds readers that "[h]uman wickedness renders sin inevitable" (83). According to such teaching, the ultimate response of the Christian to discern injustices is to learn humility and to respond to them with a spirit of meekness.

Gary Ferguson begins developing the idea of female resistance as a leitmotif in the *Heptaméron* in an essay entitled "Gendered Oppositions in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*." He notes a feminine opposition to the male reworking of the conventional meanings associated with language and rhetorical devices. This pattern of resistance to masculine contortions of traditional virtues and vices is "based on a concept of womanly honor, defined in terms of chastity or fidelity, and a reaffirmation of conventional semantic values" (144). Ferguson goes on to demonstrate that this adherence to a female code of honor subverts aristocratic male domination by deferring *jouissance* and transcending class distinctions between the social elite and the aspiring bourgeoisie. Promoting a chaste, transcendent love permits Marguerite to adhere to a Christian and courtly (in the Renaissance sense of *courtoisie* versus the medieval *amour courtois*)⁶⁹ ideal love and resist the male-centered alternative of immediate sexual fulfillment through seduction, pressure and/or violence.

A Female Voice in the *Chansons spirituelles*

From the above summary of current critical consensus regarding Marguerite's feminism, it obviously relies heavily on the idea of submission to a higher authority and delayed gratification. It is rarely, if ever, overt and searches for the perfection of traditional gender roles rather than a subversive undermining of such roles. Though the *Chansons spirituelles* are not

⁶⁹ Whereas *amour courtois* is illicit and outside the bounds of religious conventions, *courtoisie* in the Renaissance carries the idea of appropriateness and has no connotations of immorality.

devoid of the same features, there are some important instances where Marguerite breaks free from these confines and directly criticizes men. Furthermore, she also tends to argue (albeit subtly) that women have a superior capacity for faith than men, hinting at a divine predisposition toward women (or at least feminine virtues). Finally, there are also moments when the texts insist upon a reversal of traditional gender roles and transfer power to the female. Demonstrating her culture's masculine bias and opposing to it a legitimate feminine voice, Marguerite challenges literary traditions while reworking them. At these moments, the poems mix a strategy of subordination with subversion and, albeit briefly, demonstrate alternatives to male-dominated gender relations.

The very existence of the *Chansons spirituelles* in a published and circulated form is an affront to male hegemony in the arena of religious instruction. As pointed out above, many religious works were being published by women. Carol Thysell summarizes their participation in theological discussions as active (despite the belittling name-calling that went on) but blatantly lacking systematic theological treatises or biblical commentaries.⁷⁰ The questions of gender and theological genre are, therefore, intertwined. At the same time, contemporary reformist leaders actively encouraged women and men alike to read the Scriptures for themselves and take part in discussions about the Bible. Luther himself even published women's religious writings when it served his purposes (Osment 20). These contradictory forces make it impossible to separate acceptable gender roles in the sixteenth century from acceptable theological publications for women.

A female authoritative voice develops throughout the *Chansons* as Marguerite merges the ideas of gender, theology, authority and feminine creativity. For Renaissance writers, the act of

⁷⁰ See especially chapter one entitled "Gender and Genre."

reworking existing ideas and framing them in creative ways is the true mark of an author's creative genius. Marguerite asserts a direct communication with God and speaks of her personal experience with Him in a way that descends from the medieval mystics and nuns mentioned above as well as from secular female writers such as Marie de France who noted in her prologue that knowledge and eloquence are gifts from God requiring her to use them.⁷¹ When the Queen of Navarre claims to be writing on God's behalf, and when she hides behind His words, she is in reality establishing her own authority. Her *œuvre* exists in tension between Marguerite's didactic voice and the author's preservation of the female virtues of humility and submission.

To what extent, then, are the *Chansons spirituelles* an avenue through which the Queen of Navarre voices her *own* spiritual beliefs? The poems are a personal account of intimate experiences with God. By publishing these accounts, Marguerite valorizes and legitimizes her female experience. She is also encouraging others (including men) to approach their relationship with God in the same manner. She creates a language of personal belief and experience that presents a challenge to established norms for a woman's religious expression. Rather than confine herself to a convent, she participates in life and takes a leadership role by exhorting others to do the same. The truth she expresses in the *Chansons spirituelles* is accessible to all – male and female. As long as one is faithful, she or he may experience God. Marguerite establishes herself and her personal experience as authoritative and thus levels the existing social hierarchy by calling into question the established dogmas of her day. She calls on her reader to contemplate the individual's personal experience rooted in God's Word as a source of truth as opposed to relying solely on the learned *magisterium* of the Church for spiritual enlightenment.

⁷¹ See the prologue of the *Lais*, lines 1-4.

In so doing, the *Chansons spirituelles* offer Marguerite de Navarre an opportunity to instruct and, as Saint Jerome put it, “cease to be a woman and be called a man” (Wilson xxiii).⁷²

Furthermore, the “inward turn” of her poems reminds the reader that the one questioning her selfhood and spirituality is a woman and that it is her, rather than that of a third party, whose authority is the basis for what she has learned about divine love.⁷³ The vast majority of the poems in the *Chansons spirituelles* are representations of an interior dialogue in which the soul of the speaker constantly questions herself and her standing before God. In the instances when a plurality is evoked, it is often for the purpose of enjoining humanity to sing the praises of God or of calling attention to the common human condition and dependency on God’s grace.⁷⁴ While she may not directly come out and declare that hers is a voice of authority, she is pointing to her individual experience as one to be emulated by her reader. This type of instruction would be acceptable during private times of feminine interaction between a mother and her daughter or a mistress and her maidservant. Challenging the prevailing male hegemony concerning religious teaching, however, the *Chansons spirituelles* invite women (and men) to share publicly in an intimate universe of spiritual interaction.

These poems are not the first place where Marguerite places such spiritual authority in unapproved hands. The *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne* (1524) provides an earlier example of such communication that exemplifies the Queen’s developing poetic authority. In this poem, eight-year old Charlotte speaks to her aunt with a spiritual authority that corresponds to Marguerite’s ability to create and generate language thus demonstrating her authority in the

⁷² Jerome, *Commentary on Epistle to the Ephesians 3:5*, quoted by Wilson.

⁷³ François Rigolot noted the progressive trend towards interiority in Renaissance writing in his article “Problematizing Renaissance Exemplarity: The Inward Turn of Dialogue from Petrarch to Montaigne.” I intend to apply his analysis in a new way, insisting upon the way Marguerite exploits this inward turn to challenge male power and assert her own feminine voice as authoritative.

⁷⁴ Chansons 1, 3, 11, 14, 16, 21, 22, 25, 27, 31, 32, 43, 47 use the first person plural “nous” for these purposes.

poem (Sommers 38).⁷⁵ Just as in the feminine training that transpires throughout the *Dialogue* where a child instructs an adult, the *Chansons spirituelles* represent a literary space where hierarchies can be inverted through the manipulation of mystical spiritual language. Marguerite not only describes her autonomy in these poems by reversing the dominant gender hierarchies in society. By offering herself as an example, she demonstrates with facility the precarious status of female desire as expressed through teaching. Reading them through this lens leaves open the possibility for feminine self-expression and self-empowerment.

Marguerite accomplishes this inversion through a mixture of literary reversals throughout the *Chansons*. These poetic innovations at once respect the models upon which they are based and transgress them. As François Rigolot notes,

Écrire au féminin, ce sera souvent provoquer des anomalies, introduire des irrégularités, forcer des renversements inattendus qui laissent deviner un désir de différence par rapport au modèle de référence. A l'horizon trans-sujetif de la lecture, c'est par rapport à ce modèle traditionnel que les écrivains féminins devront se situer pour revendiquer leur droit à la parole. ("Écrire au féminin" 7)

Marguerite's poetry goes even further than insisting upon a woman's right to speak. The texts subtly reveal a contradictory tendency to assent to the prevailing view of women as the object of adoration (e.g. the *mignon* in courtly love lyric) as well as to perform an empowering transfer of authority to the woman as she takes on the role of speaker in the poems. This tension between cooperating on one level with her predecessors and rejecting their message on another energizes

⁷⁵ Sommers gives a detailed analysis of the poem and highlights in particular the fact that it would be highly unorthodox for a younger girl to instruct her aunt as takes place in the poem.

any reading of Marguerite's poetry and serves as a platform from which future feminists such as Louis Labé could develop a feminine voice in non-religious spheres.⁷⁶

For one such example of this power inversion, I turn to Chanson 38 ("Seigneur, je suis la mignonne"), which reverses the traditional roles of the courtly love lyric and empowers the *mignonne* with speech. Typical courtly love lyrics often ascribe the name "mignonne" to the lady who is the subject of the poem. The lover sings the praises of his unnamed lady and extols her virtue and beauty as exceeding all others. Consistent with male-dominated hierarchy, the woman exists only because of the man's word and his imagination. He reduces her to various body parts or character qualities. Despite the fact that she is ostensibly the subject of the poem, his poetic prowess and creativity are on display. The (often) masculine poet effaces the true subject of the poem and puts the emphasis on himself.⁷⁷

Refusing to be such a silent object of adoration, the *mignonne* of this poem takes the masculine role of describing the object of her affection. She sings the praises of Christ – the "filz d'un très grand prince" (25). In typical fashion, she starts by declaring His beauty, but after only two lines, she turns to consider His character. Enamored with His "bonne grace" (7), "douceur" (9), and "amour seur et ferme" (13), she goes on to mention His wealth, high social status, and ability to govern His subjects wisely (21-28). The *mignonne* returns to a more physical plane to sing her Lover's strength and battle-proven dominance (37-60). This power contrasts sharply with the tenderness and humility that the poet's voice describes next (61-76). She then takes a small pause in her description of her Lover to talk about herself and her reaction to His love (77-92). Finally, she returns to the ostensible subject of her song – her Lover – and reviews His

⁷⁶ For example, Rigolot notes that for Louise Labé, "[...] c'est cette tension entre le désir de subvertir et la nécessité de collaborer qui fait vibrer le tissu de l'œuvre et lui donne sa vérité humaine." ("Écrire" 7).

⁷⁷ For an enlightening and thorough discussion of gender roles in troubadour lyric poetry, see Kay.

qualities before ending on an ambiguous note questioning the possibility of actually knowing and loving like Him.

The end of the poem, however, throws into question the very reason for its existence. In the last few verses, the *mignonne* directly engages the reader and encourages her to “have” her Lover, but she simultaneously implies the impossibility (or at least the high improbability) of such a condition by using a conditional construction to express her doubt.

Amour est sa congnoissance;

Parquoy, quand vous aymer[i]ez

Parfaictement, sans doubance

Mon amy vous n’auriez. (105-08)

Here the *amye* seems unsure of the possibility of actualizing the intimate knowledge of the divine that she just demonstrated in the preceding lines. The kind of love it takes to know God is perfect. It must be complete and undivided. The use of the conditional mood grammatically describes her uncertainty and demonstrates the subtle tendency of the poem to question itself and its own authority.

Furthermore, since this gift of friendship and intimacy with God is bestowed only upon the most humble, the poem denounces certain characteristics that are culturally attributed to males as something to be avoided and lauds what society generally considers lower, female qualities. The last stanza points to the fact that Christ alone is the unequaled master of all virtue (101-2), thus, putting Him in a position of superiority. The pining *mignonne* is appropriately subordinated by her master, and she claims that to know Him truly, she would have to be strong enough to look at the sun (103-4). This *topos* of inability assumes a typically feminine position

of servitude and subordination. The assumption of a feminine figure – i.e. bride – for the Christian in relationship to God or Christ as the husband is common in the devotional tradition within which Marguerite is writing. In this poem, if the reader were ever to enjoy the same relationship described above, she would, in fact, have to become like the One she adores, taking on His qualities.

As if self-conscious of this inversion of power structures she commits by making her voice the dominant one, the *mignonne* silences herself and begins to be the object of her description for two stanzas in the middle of the poem.

L'amyie qui est navrée
 De son très plaisant regard
 D'autre amour est delivrée,
 Ne prenant plus d'autre esgard
 Que à l'œil qui d'aymer la tente
 Et peult son mal appaiser;
 Mais elle est bien plus contente
 Quant sa bouche peult baiser.

Seigneur...

Car le baiser de sa bouche
 Et le regarde de son œil
 Jusques au fond du cueur touche,
 Dont il chasse ennuy et dueil.
 En joye et plaisir exceedde

Le plaisir de ceste là
 Qui le bon et beau possedde
 Nul ne le scet qui ne l'a. (77-92)

She is at once describing subject and described object. She transgresses culturally and rhetorically prescribed gender roles when she begins to talk about herself in the third person. The typical courtly love poet is a man who describes his lady. She is the object of his description. In these verses, Marguerite has inverted these roles. Then, she inverts the formula again. She not only describes her Lover, but she also performs a voyeuristic description of herself in relation to Christ.

The vision Marguerite gives of herself at once promotes and denies her power. Ostensibly, she places herself back under the authority of her male Lover. She is the object of His “regard” in line 78. She describes herself as “navrée” in the preceding line. A forceful descriptor, this word carries connotations of being deeply wounded or vexed.⁷⁸ She definitely sees herself as submitting to pain, but this pain is not without pleasure, for the glance that causes her such distress is “plaisant.” It is only by enduring such harsh treatment from her Lover that she can hope to purify her soul. His love alone can “son mal appaiser.” In this way, Marguerite transposes traditional male and female desire. Typically, females are seen as both the source of pain and as healers of the same. Marguerite takes this image and inverts it. Her Lover’s gaze vexes her soul and alleviates her suffering. He seems to have the power. However, the image is destabilized as the stanza continues, for it is the *amye* who seeks more from the relationship than a simple glance. She takes it upon herself to kiss the Lover’s mouth (84). She actively fragments

⁷⁸ Love figured as a wound is a common metaphor in both erotic and religious traditions. For an example of the former, see Marie de France’s Guigemar.

and reduces His body to a collection of parts that she desires and possesses (91), and their relationship consummates her “joye et plaisir” (89). Despite the idea of female resistance Gary Ferguson posits concerning the female *devisants* of the *Heptaméron*, here the reader sees an *amye* fully embracing sensual pleasure from the interaction she has with her Lover.⁷⁹ She is no longer the servant but has become the served. Having placed herself in the position of power, the *mignonne* disappears from the text and is replaced by the *amye*.⁸⁰ She has become the equally expressive feminine version of her *amy*.

Uncomfortable with this new balance of power, Marguerite reins in the expression of her freedom. She reverses the direction of the kiss from line 84 to emphasize her Lover’s active role (85), and makes sure the reader knows that she, the *amye*, is still the object of the Lover’s eye (86). Her timidity serves to cloak the instability she has just introduced into typical contemporary male-female relationships. She thus manages to make a statement about existing limits of male dominance by calling into question the validity of such dominance, presenting its paradoxes and demonstrating the possibility of an alternative way of viewing such power relationships. Though she returns to her submissive position as *mignonne* in the refrain, it is not before she has opened the door to the possibilities of a shared power between the sexes – *amy* as well as *amye*.

This theme of equality between the sexes reappears throughout the *Chansons spirituelles*. In the first *chanson*, the mourning sister enjoins both men and women to join her in prayer for her dead brother’s soul. She says, “J’appelle chacun Saint et Sainte / Pour se joindre à mon

⁷⁹ I am not contradicting Ferguson’s analysis; in fact, I believe it accurately describes the idea of female resistance in the majority of Marguerite’s writing. I do demonstrate below, however, that there are other demonstrations of female pleasure in Marguerite’s poetry that do not necessarily consist of deferred gratification. It is evident, even in this poem, that the here and now offer inferior pleasures as compared to those experienced in the relationship with the Divine Lover (see line 90). I believe this text is referring to a spatial, as opposed to a temporal (key in Ferguson’s analysis), distance in this poem (*là* versus *ici*).

⁸⁰ She still refers to herself as the *mignonne* in the refrain, but her dominant poetic persona has switched to the *amye* throughout the rest of the poem.

oraison” (30-1). In her notes, Michèle Clément suggests that this is a reference to the intercessory role of saints (199). She argues that Marguerite is advocating the necessity of saint’s work to bring a sinner’s prayer before God. Some critics argue that such would be contrary to the Reformed theology that heavily influenced Marguerite during the composition of these poems.⁸¹ However, contemporary Catholics believed in the intercessory role of the saints as well as an individual’s right of direct access to God because of and through Christ. Marguerite’s poems consistently reference the saints (including Mary, as I point out below), and the Queen herself made pilgrimages to holy sites. Here, however, the context would seem to indicate that she is not speaking of “saints” in that understanding of the word, but rather that she means it in the Pauline sense as referring to the redeemed since, just a few lines before (25-26), the speaker states, “O Dieu, qui les vostres ayez, / J’adresse à vous seul ma complainte,” indicating that she has a direct interaction with God. More likely, then, this is a call to holy men and holy women to join her in prayer for the king.⁸² Obviously, if they are to join her they must be aware that she is interceding. Her act must of necessity be a public one. By specifically adding the feminine form of the word, she legitimizes the role of women’s public expression. She is granting authority for them to pray openly with men. Why can they do this? The answer lies in the previously quoted lines. The direct communication that the believer has with God does not depend on an intercessor – masculine or feminine.

Another instance of a call to both men and women occurs in “Mon ame n’ha plus autre esgard” (Chanson 30). In the midst of a summary of the images she has used to describe Christ

⁸¹ Both Lefèvre and Briçonnet were suspicious of the cult of saints and strongly stressed the individual believer’s right to access the throne of God based solely on the work of Jesus Christ. See Reid, p. 137 for a more detailed account of especially Lefèvre’s view on the intercessory role of saints.

⁸² This would be more consistent with a Pauline (and, thereby, evangelical) usage of the term “saint.” He refers to all believers as “saints of God” in his letters to the churches. Though it would not, necessarily, exclude the traditional understanding of the word.

earlier in the poem, the tormented soul cries “O voye de tout homme et femme / Donne au captive ta liberté” (33-4). She is determined to remind Christ, herself and her reader that salvation does not make any distinction between male and female, echoing Paul’s declaration that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” and establishing an equality between the sexes in terms of the need for grace.⁸³ In Chanson 32, this idea reappears when the poet provides for equal freedom (implying equal original guilt) through Christ’s atoning sacrifice:

En ce [Christ’s] sang là nous sommes,

Autant femmes comme hommes

Du tout renduz parfaitz,

Du peché et ses sommes,⁸⁴

Nous en ostant les sommes

Il a porté le faix. (35-40)

In this poem, the poetic voice speaks in a first-person plural voice, further highlighting the common plight of males and females and undermining prevailing doctrine which placed women on a lower spiritual standing than men. Salvation is offered to both sexes because both are in equal need.

The Benefits of Femininity

Interestingly, however, redemption in Marguerite’s poems most often comes to those who demonstrate feminine characteristics as defined by her culture. Even in the above mentioned poem (chanson 30), it is the soul who submits to Christ’s gaze that is eventually unified with the

⁸³ Galatians 3:28 says “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

⁸⁴ In the notes to her edition of the *Chansons spirituelles*, Michèle Clément clarifies the expression “la somme des péchés” as meaning both the burden of sin in terms of guilt and the accumulation of transgressions against God that is counted in the sinner’s account (240).

Lord and becomes like Him (39). In fact, in another song, the Queen specifically mentions men's desire for women and sexual gratification as the exact opposite of what it means to be a true Christian.

Pour estre bien vray Chrestien
 Il faut à Christ estre semblable,
 Renoncer tout bien terrien,
 Et tout honneur qui est damnable,
 Et la Dame belle et jolye,
 Et plaisir qui la chair esmeult;
 Laisser biens, honneurs, et amye:
 Il ne fait pas le tour qui veult. (Chanson 29 1-8)

In a pointed statement against specifically masculine vices, Marguerite completely shatters Pauline silence and directly confronts the men of her day. She points out that their concupiscence is what keeps them from being conformed to the image of Christ and attacks the masculine notion of strength later in the poem when she declares that “De la mort fault estre vainqueur, / En la trouvant plaisante et belle” (17-8). She encourages her reader (whom she obviously expects to be male) to leave behind “vengeance, ire, et envie” (13) to embrace the idea of submission to death. Men are encouraged to take a subservient position to a new lover. No longer are they to be fulfilling their own lusts on one less powerful than they. Instead, they are to assume the position of subordination, accepting and enjoying melancholy and torment (“S’esjouyr en malancolie, / Et tourment, dont la Chair se deult” 21-2).

Later writers recognize the transgression Marguerite commits here. When seven of her songs are reproduced in *Les Annonces de l'esprit, et de l'âme fidèle* (1602), references to men are redacted and generalized. So the first verses become

Pour estre bien vray Chrestien
 A Christ faut estre semblable,
 Renoncer tout bien terrien
 Et tout honneur qui est damnable,
 La personne jointe et jolie
 Et tout ce qui la chair esmeut
 La tenant pour son ennemie,
 Il ne fait pas le tour qui veult.⁸⁵

Marguerite clearly indicates that men should reign in their sexual appetite and give up their pursuit of “la Dame” in order to be more like Christ. By choosing to limit the attack to those who would seduce a woman, it is obvious that the masculine sex is the specific target of this teaching point. Marguerite’s poem takes on a distinctly feminine voice at this point as the author brings this charge against men and is silent when it comes to female libido. Obviously, the Queen goes too far in the minds of traditionalists with this direct critique of men and masculine vices. From their perspective, it would be unfitting for a woman to instruct men on their need to clean up their lives and to begin to exhibit more feminine qualities. Therefore, the lady is replaced with the gender neutral “person” in the updated version, and the tempting *amye* in the original version is replaced by ambivalent *ennemie* in the authorized hymnal. The editor of the hymnal goes

⁸⁵ Chanson VII in *Les Annonces de l'esprit, et de l'âme fidèle*, A Saint Gervais, Par les hoirs d'Eustace Vignon, 1602.

beyond removing direct references to men as the primary evildoers in the text. He remasculinizes the song by subtly reinforcing feminine guilt. The redactions allow the reader or singer to ignore the gender of the transgressor and effectively silence the feminine voice that animates Marguerite's original song.

Marguerite, however, is relentless on this point and provides image after image of feminine penitents who receive the free grace of Christ. Furthermore, the images she employs revalue sexual and social roles (such as wife, mother) in a way that subverts orthodoxy regarding females. In Chanson 34, these emphases converge and combine in one of the clearest examples of the author's esteem for feminine virtues. One of the longest poems in the *Chansons*, this is a description of a *malheureuse* who wanders a barren wasteland. She finds hope by the goodness of God when

Par foy elle reçoit la grace
 En cestuy [God] là qui la soubtient,
 Et par foy elle voy la face
 De l'amy dont tout bien luy vient. (101-04)

At this point, her outlook on life changes, and she revalues every relationship she has had until this moment. For example, the role of mother during the Renaissance was feminine, yet the *malheureuse* finds in Christ "pere et mere" (109) among an extended list of other earthly relationships – all in the masculine. At the moment when she receives grace and is granted true spiritual understanding, her concept of God transcends gender. She finds it impossible to describe the Divine in purely masculine terms.

These lines are quite significant in the development of feminist thought. Here, Marguerite is implying that not only does God accept women, but He also exhibits some of their qualities. When it comes to Christiformity, believers must demonstrate characteristics of both genders. She takes this line of reasoning one step further and actually performs such an androgynous formulation of faith in *Chanson* 13.

As noted above, Marguerite's poetic voice is typically that of a female. In this poem, however, the speaker is male. He says he is

[...a]moureux non en Ville,
 Ny en Maison, ny en Chasteau,
 Ce n'est de femme ny de fille,
 Mais du seul Bon, puissant, et beau. (9-12)

In a rejection of his sexuality, the speaker declares that he will go on to pursue an intimate relationship with God. In the same stanza, he remarks that God "a ravy à soy mon cœur" (16). The word "ravy" in this context usually refers to a carrying away or ravishment. Though Marguerite often includes this violence in descriptions of her relationship with God, she does so via a female speaker who submits to the ravishing strength of God.⁸⁶ Here, the masculine speaker is "ravy." He is the one who suffers a violation of his person as he submits to God in a typically feminine posture.

The poem further blurs the lines between the genders when Marguerite has her narrator come out and call God his "Amy" (38) and "Espoux" (39). This in and of itself is not significant since allegorical readings of the Song of Songs had long ago established the paradigm of the

⁸⁶ See *Chansons* 28, 30, 34, 38, 41, 42.

(male) Christian as (female) bride. Such representation is not uncommon in the devotional tradition, since Christ is the bridegroom. This poem, however, makes it difficult for the reader to remember that the one speaking is a man. In so doing, Marguerite quietly calls into question prevailing hierarchies between the genders. If one can so easily slip from one gender to another and take on characteristics of the other, the rigid differences in position that are ecclesiastically and socially prescribed may also be subject to defiance. In fact, taking the reasoning one step further, she is also suggesting that those who relate to God from a feminine position are more favored by Him. He bestows His free gifts upon them, and He demonstrates a kind of spiritual “favoritism” toward them. The poem goes on to suggest such a special relationship between God and women when the speaker ceases talking from a masculine perspective and switches to the point of view of his soul. Conveniently, *ame* is feminine in French, and the adjectives and pronouns he uses to refer to himself can, thus, be feminized and he can take his place “uny à luy [God]” (61).

Other poems also posit a privileged position for women in the divine economy. The first *chanson* in the collection, written during Francis I’s sickness, gives women (and others with lower social standing) exalted positions.

O grand Medecin tout puissant,
 Redonnez luy santé parfaite,
 Et des ans vivre jusqu’à cent,
 Et à son cœur ce qu’il souhaite;
 Lors sera la joye refaite,
 Que douleur brise dens nos coeures;

Dont louenge vous sera faite

De femme, enfans, et serviteurs. (73-80)⁸⁷

Women, children and servants are all people under authority in Marguerite's society. The Queen of Navarre holds to the evangelical tenant that favors the simple and disadvantaged as being the ones who see God's work. In the spiritual community that she creates in her poems, this truth conceptually reverses society's discrimination against such people and places them on a pedestal. They assume the role of instructor and example.

The Virgin Mary in the *Chansons spirituelles*

For many of Marguerite's readers, the Virgin Mary would have represented the ultimate model to be followed, for she symbolized not only feminine perfection but also incarnated the human virtues of chastity and humility. The elevation of Mary in the late Middle Ages and the codification of her adoration would seemingly result in a higher position for women. The Protestant doctrine that removed the Virgin and other saints as objects of adoration had an unequal effect on men and women because it leaves open access to masculine identities as expressed in God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ but closes off any avenue of feminine worship and help ("City Women" 88).

Marguerite also holds Mary up as an example to follow, but she does so in a clearly evangelical way. For example, in *Chanson 32*, the speaker calls on his listeners to join in following Mary's example of honoring Christ:

⁸⁷ In a note on the singular "femme," Clément argues that "ce singulier ici dans une énumération au pluriel, comme d'ailleurs au vers 113, peut compenser une possible erreur de versification par une liberté syntaxique (sauf si la femme du v. 80 désigne Eléonore d'Autriche et l'homme du v. 113 le messager de la guérison du Roi)" (201-02). Based on the generalized nature of this section of the poem – the speaker switches from 'je' to 'nous' – it seems unlikely that the "femme" refers to a specific person. I am, therefore, more likely to accept Clément's first explanation for the aberrations in the lists.

Et prenons pour exemple
 De luy [Christ] porter honneur
 Celle qui est le temple
 Du souverain Seigneur :
 Pas n'est la vierge folle
 Qui tout le monde affolle
 Car ceste cy a creu
 En la sainte Parole
 Du grand maistre d'eschole
 Qu'elle a par Foy conceu. (61-70)

The admonition is tempered, however, by a warning to avoid the excess of offering undue reverence to the Virgin instead of to her holy offspring. Marguerite's Mary stands in contrast to the subject of the Marian poetic tradition in the years before and after this poem. Instead of an object of adoration, the Mary of this poem points true believers to the Word of God. Like a school child who must be directed to the source of knowledge, Mary learns from the Great Schoolmaster. At the same time, she is a teacher herself. She shows the way of faith and conceived and gave birth to the Savior of humanity. This poem, then, both carefully calibrates appropriate veneration and reinforces Mary's authority and elevated status.

The double valence of her condition correlates well to the problematic status of a female writer such as Marguerite. In a similar way, Marguerite's *chansons* encourage the reader to follow their example and to seek the same kind of intimacy with God they portray. As demonstrated earlier, they also promote religious ideas that conflict with established church dogma in an authoritative manner. Marguerite's authorial voice is evidence of the same

empowering process. She proclaims her own ignorance (as seen in the dedicatory letter of the *Marguerites*), yet she points men and women to God. By faith, she ostensibly allows God to speak through her and instruct all fellow believers. She, like Mary, conceives and brings forth an authoritative word, and despite her pretense of being silent, she writes profusely and speaks clearly for herself. The poems direct men and women to imitate Mary's faith and devotion as well as her need to be instructed. Men are not exempt from being taught, and they are placed on the same spiritual plane as women.

The above description of Mary as an unlearned person going to school also fits smoothly within the evangelical framework of spiritual revelation and understanding. Early humanists stressed the importance of approaching a text innocently and without preconceived notions about its meaning. Allowing the text (namely the Bible) to speak for itself is the hallmark of the humble and ignorant soul that receives true knowledge. Marguerite was also obviously influenced by her correspondence with Guillaume Briçonnet on this point. He advises her in one of his letters that she should approach God's Word and His promises as a beggar who has nothing to offer. He writes, "Mendicité est sy delicate qu'elle serche ne riens faire et, par ce, mendiante pour ne riens faire, plus est plaine et habondante oisive que besongnante" (11). Marguerite applied this to her understanding of Mary. Mary's fruitfulness is not a result of a pious life or an elevated status before God. Rather she shares with all humanity the need for forgiveness and enlightenment. The same faith that works justification in the evangelical's heart is what allowed Mary to conceive the Son of God in her womb.

The narrator continues with a list extolling Mary's virtues beginning with faith and passing through love, hope, humility and moral purity (among others). He ends by citing "Sa prudence et constance, / Douceur, humanité" (79-80). Summing up Mary's key characteristics,

the narrator chooses to stop with her humanity. The poem is clearly refuting the idea that Mary somehow enjoys a more elevated state than the rest of mortal men. Just as Gary Ferguson remarks concerning other poems that speak about Mary, “For Marguerite, Mary is primarily the one who is full of grace, the one who hears the Word of God and accepts it in faith” (*Mirroring* 103). The reason the evangelical should look to Mary is not because she enjoys a special position above the rest of humanity; instead, she is the humble recipient of God’s grace. On the one hand, then, there is a careful circumscription of Mary’s status that would seem to fall in line with other evangelical teachings concerning the Mother of God and reinforce the patriarchal ideals of the Reformation by closing off another expression of female spirituality.

On the other hand, carefully read in another light, the Protestant warning against excess veneration of the Virgin actually empowers women and other subordinates within the patriarchal male-centered system that dominated Renaissance life. If even the most revered of the saints represents not an unattainable ideal but an example to be emulated and reproduced in every believer’s life, women are suddenly elevated in their standing before God and among humanity in general. In fact, the argument could again be made that the more “feminine” qualities an individual displays, the more intimately he or she can experience God. Viewed from this angle, Marguerite’s theology simultaneously corresponds to evangelical doctrine concerning the saints and the accessibility of God to all believers and diverges from it by subverting the strict gender roles and regulations Calvin, Bèze and others imposed on their congregations concerning church hierarchy and leadership.

Considering other references to Mary, however, reveals that Marguerite does not clearly define the implications of the Virgin for women. In an earlier *chanson*, Christ Himself reminds

the reader that the Mother of God is but flesh and bone (Chanson 7). Speaking of His suffering on the cross to pay for humanity's sins He says,

J'ay pour vous delaissé ma vie à mort amere,
 Et en tresgrand douleur ma tresaymée Mere :
 Pour vous monstrier que chair, tant soit elle estimée,
 Ne doit sinon pour Dieu et en Dieu estre aymée. (75-78)

Though the mother of Christ is still loved and esteemed by her Son, He asserts that his ultimate devotion is to His Father. Marguerite sums up the value that Mary has for Christ in the role she plays in God's glorification. As in the previously discussed poem, she points people to God, but she is still human and, as all flesh, has no value in and of herself outside of how she can demonstrate God's glory. It would be difficult to take this passage as elevating Mary or women in general. One pro-woman argument that could be made from these lines would be the implication of men's and women's equal worthlessness compared to God. Humanity finds itself in a common plight, and neither sex is more or less valuable in God's sight.

Conclusion

As with so many of her theological positions, Marguerite also performs a balancing act with her position on the Virgin and the resulting implications for the female sex. In fact, there are few (if any) cases of direct instruction concerning Mary or the role of women in the public sphere in the *Chansons spirituelles*. Instead, the poet relies on the subtle proffering of ideas, no matter how briefly, to serve the didactic aims of the songs. Thus, the appearances of Marguerite's feminism often occur only indirectly. Just as she challenges prevailing dogma regarding a woman's role in the church by propagating her teaching through the singing of

songs, the songs themselves are not overtly feminist. There are, however, times when she directly condemns masculine vices and promotes the idea that God is predisposed to feminine (as her society defines them) virtues such as submission and humility. In essence, she challenges patriarchal conceptions of the nature of females and inverts the balance of power between men and women. In order to accomplish this goal, she bends traditional literary *topoi* to suit her needs and to obfuscate lines between the genders – especially when it comes to access to God. She is not afraid to androgynously switch between masculine and feminine voices – empowering each sex and then shying away from the possibilities she opens to her readers. Of course, Marguerite is not strident, but balanced regarding her own ideas, and later writers expand and more clearly define these timid notions of a feminine voice. She was, after all, implicated in patriarchal structures as Queen of Navarre and sister of the King of France. Still, there is a strong case to be made that along with the idea of female resistance that others have noted, there is also a more aggressive side to the Queen’s discreet feminism she uses to promote female equality and even, at times, superiority in the spiritual economy. Marguerite’s *Chansons* stand in contrast to earlier writers, concerning whom critics have argued that the “nature [of true female spirituality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance] consists in an embrace of non-exclusive, co-existing relations and functions which may well strike us readers as cognate with the most enduring historical female roles [...]” (Meuller 160). These domestic roles include wife and mother, but Marguerite voices a double-sided feminine spirituality that subtly challenges prevailing views of females and their participation in the public sphere. Her work publicly expresses a particularly feminine spirituality. As Louise Labé would write in her famous dedicatory epistle that opens her 1555 *Oeuvres*:

Estant le tems venu, Madameoiselle, que les severes loix des hommes
 n'empeschent plus les femmes de s'appliquer aus sciences et disciplines, il me
 semble que celles qui ont la commodité, doivent employer cette honneste liberté
 que notre sexe ha autre fois tant desiree, à icelles apprendre (41).

Perhaps the time for women to begin speaking and teaching started a few years before Labé declared its official opening. Marguerite's poems subtly challenge prevailing social conventions that shut women out of public discourse by advancing the notion of female authorship and, therefore, authority. Leah Chang notes that Labé's introduction, though commencing with a focus on the present, quickly turns to consider past female writers. Chang writes, "Writing for women enables a *mise-en-abime* in which the writer seeks the past – or rather, reconstructs it on paper – in order to bring it into the present, thereby rendering it more pleasurable or meaningful" (Chang 122). Marguerite writes to document her personal experience with God. She publishes her work as a public display of this relationship and as a sort of instruction book for others who would follow her example. In this way, the Queen's work not only materializes her presence as a female author and authority, it also gives voice to female desire. Later writers, such as Labé, would solidify and further differentiate this emerging *écriture au féminin* from their male-counterparts.

Chapter Three – Poetic and Rhetorical Tensions

Introduction

In addition to issues of theology and gender, the Queen of Navarre's rhetorical and poetic manipulations in the *Chansons spirituelles* (published in the *Marguerites de la marguerite des princesses* [1547]) constitute a significant contribution to the early modern struggle with self-hood and subjectivity. Her poetry can be read as one individual's conception of the divine nature (Sommers), and she regularly structures her poems around a first-person subject position in order to delineate and elaborate the psychological entity she often terms her 'soul.'⁸⁸ This delimitation of her soul and the accompanying details that clarify its position relative to the author underscore the texts' obsessions with subjectivity. Marguerite infuses her poetry with meditations about what it means to be a literary subject and an individual who expresses herself through verse. The fact that all *chansons spirituelles* are *contrafacta* revisions of popular songs also highlights the polyphonic nature of her poetry due to the genre's inherent overlapping of voice. Within the poems themselves, the Queen recasts familiar *topoi* and rhetorical devices such as personified abstractions, internal dialogue, the narrativization of the soul and pastoral landscapes to embellish and clarify the idea of the soul. However, these techniques add to the polysemous nature of both self-hood and the texts themselves. Specifically, ambiguities arise surrounding the nature of this psychological entity in relation to the divine, to the poems' audience, and to rhetorical norms in general. Furthermore, the way in which Marguerite personalizes (and sometimes reverses) these rhetorical devices infuses the songs with questions regarding the relationship between the literary subject and the self. The 'failure' of the poems to respond adequately to these difficulties foregrounds the elusive nature of self-hood and the indeterminacy

⁸⁸ Many of Navarre's *Chansons spirituelles* are often narrated by the soul. This entity often takes on properties characteristic of the modern understanding of the self. Given the emergent understanding of self-hood among her contemporaries, the soul incorporates the psychological traits now associated with the self.

of subjectivity. The place of the amorphous subject is undermined and divided as the tension between desire and death mount. Marguerite provocatively brings tradition and innovation together to question the very notion of what it means to be an individual believer and member of society. The various poetic techniques she employs to describe the relationship between her internal and external self provide the point of departure for this chapter. In the end, this uncertainty reveals Marguerite's own apprehensions regarding her relationship to the other. Specifically, she is held hostage between the humanistic position of empowerment and the evangelical constraint of self-denial.

***Chansons spirituelles* and Evangelical Self-hood**

In order to analyze the place of the individual within Marguerite's *Chansons spirituelles*, it is first necessary to establish the context in which they were written. The *chanson spirituelle* genre blossoms throughout the sixteenth century due to evangelicals' penchant to avoid superficial and lavish music that, in their mind, characterizes popular and ecclesiastical songs, respectively. John Calvin later specifically enumerates and denounces these excesses in his role as the secular authority in Geneva (Brown 145). Typically, the writer of a *chanson spirituelle* takes a popular secular song and keeps the melody but changes the lyrics to reflect a spiritualized understanding of God's love and grace and the believer's faith. Most importantly, the new text gives preeminence to God's Word. The principle of *sola scriptura* that pervades all aspects of the evangelical's life requires the language of man to be subject to God's Word.⁸⁹ The resulting new song accordingly reflects the sinner's transformed nature and is suitable for the reformed/evangelical Christian to sing in church and at home.

⁸⁹ My chapter on theological tensions elaborates on the centrality of this basic evangelical tenant and its broader implications for Marguerite and her poetry.

In this way, *chansons spirituelles* in general serve as metaphors for the evangelical understanding of the spiritual transformation that occurs in regeneration by grace⁹⁰. In an effort to promulgate this message, the group at Meaux that surrounds Marguerite's spiritual advisor, Guillaume Briçonnet, publishes such songs, and the authors are subsequently persecuted by the Parliament of Paris as early as 1525 (Brown 147). Given the intensity of inquisitions surrounding any new songs, it is apparent that Catholic leaders do not dismiss the importance of these songs. The authorities passionately pursue the songwriters for promoting their new religion and threatening orthodoxy (148).

Specifically, this persecution seeks to counteract the emphasis on the individual nature of the soul that permeates the new songs. As writers intertwine theology, intimate devotional responses to God and their personal interpretation of God's word, they carve out a space for self-expression and personal agency and lay foundations for the psychological entity that moderns will call the "self." The subsequent personalization of theological formulae and frameworks leads to a Protestant poetry that, as Gary Ferguson notes, "focuses the attention of the reader on the lament of the sinner to the almost total exclusion of any consideration of God's mercy or the saving passion of Christ" (*Mirroring* 7).

This individualized evangelical expression is quite different from a modern, post-Romantic understanding of personalization in which one's own particular feelings or reactions stress the uniqueness of the individual. Personalization for the evangelical is not a matter of effusive emanations describing a suffering that is distinct from all others'. Rather, as Protestant poetry develops, it exhibits anxiety about the fallen nature of humanity *in general* and the

⁹⁰ Though Protestants stressed that man remained a sinner even after salvation, as I discuss in my chapter on theological tensions, they taught that the Spirit of Christ came to dwell in the believer's heart, and thus, regenerate him or her with Christ's life.

resulting implications for the individual soul's fate and eternal destiny (*Mirroring* 8). In particular, Marguerite de Navarre's later works (including the *Chansons spirituelles*) express a quintessential pessimism regarding the nature of humankind (*Mirroring* 42). This uncertainty results in a poetic expression that is concerned with and turned toward the individual as bearer of an insurmountable sin debt. The evangelical's expression of personhood vacillates between an optimistic confidence in God's grace extended to humanity through the work of Christ and a tortured restlessness concerning the extension of this general grace to the individual's soul.

The resulting inner anxiety leads to a concept of the self as either a slave to its own passions or as taking part in the divine nature that is externally imputed by Christ. The self is individualized only insofar as its relationship to an exterior construct – either sin or Christ – is realized. Self-definition is a result of describing where one falls in this dichotomy. Though couched in evangelical terminology, this dialogic nature falls nicely in line with what others posit concerning the necessity of reference points to any cohesive understanding of the self. For example, in his history of the self Charles Taylor observes,

I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who are essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding – and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call “webs of interlocution.” 36

Placing this idea in the context of justification and sanctification clarifies what this means for evangelical poets such as Marguerite de Navarre. Ehsan Amed has highlighted the shifting

view of the self in Marguerite's *Chansons spirituelles* (Law 69-93).⁹¹ According to his analysis, the soul in the Queen's poetry strays from a "charitable self" whose essence is in the keeping of the (Mosaic) commandments. These laws, according to Augustine, push those who keep them to perform acts of charity and, thus, practically demonstrate union with God and with His followers. Amed maintains that as the *chansons* develop, it is possible to observe a faith-based entity, free from the legal requirements laid down. This evangelical view of the self sees identification with Christ (and His body, the church) as contingent upon a loving relationship granted by God's sovereign grace as opposed to legalistic fulfillment of certain ordinances or sacraments. This tension saturates the *Chansons spirituelles* as Marguerite employs different rhetorical strategies to give voice to a self caught between the two viewpoints.

Such polyphonic techniques and tensions also find their influence in a more secular context that cannot be overlooked. As one of the most influential lyric poets on French writers in the Renaissance, Petrarch's approach to structuring his poems strongly impacted all modes of poetic expression. William J. Kennedy remarks that the "Petrarchan speaker's rhetorical strategy of alternating and suspending contrarities" creates a poetic expression that allows a "dialectical unity to evolve out of multiplicity" (20). Though Petrarch's tension results primarily from the relationship between (implied) speaker and (intended) audience, the Italian poet's manipulation of *ethos* and *pathos* "generate[s] a field of contrasts, reversals, and antitheses" which are the hallmark of Marguerite's poetry as well (22).

Marguerite, of course, adapts Petrarchan themes to religious use and often substitutes her soul and Christ as the two lovers in her texts. This reflects her evangelical attitude toward the

⁹¹ In this chapter, Ahmed fits the *Chansons spirituelles* between Marot and Ronsard as a pivotal work in the renovation of the song form in the French Renaissance.

individual's intimate relationship with Christ. Still, as I demonstrated earlier, the tension between speaker and addressee remains, and she does not discard the ambiguity of the literary subject that characterizes the Petrarchan sonnet (Kennedy 27). In the same manner, her poetry tends to drift. It slips between voices and images in a way that encourages a constantly shifting perspective within the individual songs. For Marguerite the question of identity, who she is as an individual, is more a question of how she interacts with the world around her. As John Jefferies Martin recently stated, "Renaissance identities [...] were less about adopting a particular stance to the world than about the question of how different stances might affect one's relations to the world and, in particular, one's relation to other human beings" (14). This in turn makes defining the self an elusive goal and reinforces the permutations Marguerite experiments with as the humanistic self-affirming author and the committed self-abjecting evangelical.

Using Poetry to Negotiate Spiritual Tension

Such conflict leads to a patchwork picture of the self in Marguerite's spiritual poetry as the author seeks to evoke and to legitimize these competing influences. The *Chansons spirituelles* are replete with examples of how the poet uses language to construct a multi-faceted, variegated self through confession that is at once a social and internal experience. This confession projects a negative self-abstraction which in turn leads to a self-recognition as the poetic persona contemplates her own sinfulness. The soul more clearly delineates itself as it delves more deeply into its own sinfulness. Moving from more abstract to more concrete differentiations, Marguerite's songs perform the construction of the self as a product of unitive grace. According to Robert Cottrell's formulation in *The Grammar of Silence*, the poet finds herself struggling with words to give shape to this amorphous creature that emerges from her

contemplations of human sinfulness.⁹² Marguerite's self-discovery develops from the fact that words are incapable of expressing her experiences. Theologically, this is linked to Luther's earlier understanding of the Scriptures as speaking to the individual soul on a personal level. Although nothing new can be said, the individual must take what has already been spoken by God in His word and interpret it and apply it within the context of his or her personal experience. Marguerite suggests that it is possible to individualize the universal word of God by appropriating it for her own uses. Through it, she creates and justifies her poetic persona's existence and challenges notions of individuality in the Renaissance as either strictly socially or individually constructed.

She does so by dislocating the notions of selfhood and literary subjectivity in several ways. First, she uses personified abstractions. Marguerite takes generalized ideas of love, for instance, and personifies them in order to create a paradoxical nearness with and separation from her reader. In particular, I am interested in demonstrating how these rhetorical manipulations anticipate and prefigure what later writers will call the fragmented self. The elusive nature of the self permeates the *Chansons spirituelles* and opens the door for a more detailed investigation of the self by later authors such as Ronsard, Du Bellay and Montaigne, highlighting the importance of these poems in French literary development.

Although personified abstractions are relatively rare in the poems, they provide valuable insight into the text's struggle with subjectivity and the role of language in this internal conflict. As a basic form of allegory, these abstractions are subject to contemporary beliefs surrounding

⁹² Cottrell's influential book was among the first to shed light on the neglected *Chansons spirituelles* and Marguerite's other devotional poetry. His work focuses on the mystical aspects of the Queen's spirituality, and I will be highlighting the rhetorical structures Navarre employs to simultaneously differentiate and unify herself as poet and poetic subject.

the concepts an author seeks to describe. They also open many levels of interpretation based on a long history of Christian exegetical practice. As I will elucidate below, the allegorical figure in Marguerite's poems is ambiguous and fluid. This, in turn, invites multiple interpreters and interpretations to interact, such rhetorical techniques make establishing clear relationships between the self and the subject more difficult. Once an author relinquishes her authority and allows the reader to participate in establishing meaning within a text, uncertainty and ambiguity increase.

One of the instances where this is evident in the *Chansons spirituelles* occurs near the end of the collection. In "Amour m'a faict" (Chanson 45), Love is personified and described differently in each of the eight stanzas that make up this poem. A straightforward reading presents an almost pedantic poem about two Loves, one spiritual ("Amour parfaict" 8) and one terrestrial ("Amour très faulx" 15), at odds with one another. The Love of the world is the source of all kinds of suffering in the poet's life and, ultimately, leads to her death.

Amour m'a faict
 Du déplaisir maincte heure;
 Le faix infect
 Qui trop au cueur demeure,
 Tout contrefaict,
 Me contrainct que je pleure
 Jusqu'à ce que je meure. (1-7)

Meanwhile perfect Love enlightens and heals her.

Amour parfaict
 Me donne congoissance
 De son effect
 Et très grande puissance[...]

 Amour très doux
 Me met en la piscine,
 Qui de tous coups
 Est vraye medecine (8-11, 36-39).

In the end, the reader finds that this purely spiritual love conquers all.

Amour mon Dieu,
 En ma mort me visite;
 En son doux feu
 A m'esveiller m'excite,
 Dont peu à peu
 A l'aymer tant m'incite;
 Enfin me resucite. (50-56)

The poet is redeemed through a spiritual death to the world, and Love itself purifies her until she is completely enamored with God. Read through this lens, the poet uses the personified Loves to generalize her personal experience. The use of allegory distances the reader from the poet's experience, and encourages the reader to interpret the poem in a general sense – as applicable to all humanity. In this sense, Marguerite's personified abstraction of love follows established rhetorical uses. The individual is not necessary to the success of the poem's didactic goals.

Rather, she is a construct exploited by the poem to communicate its message of universal redemption through spiritual love.

Such an eradication of oneself from the poem would be important since Marguerite is writing to promote the evangelical doctrine sweeping Europe. Both Martin Luther and the Queen's spiritual advisor, Guillaume Briçonnet, advocated self-annihilation as a basic step toward spiritual enlightenment and union with God. By erasing herself from the poem, Marguerite would seem to be following the protocol of her evangelical leanings.

Contrary to this model, however, one may also see the poem as a reversal of traditional rhetorical conventions. It is possible that Marguerite, instead of generalizing a personal experience, is actually individualizing a common, shared reality between her and her reader. The individual self becomes the central figure of the poem as opposed to the theological lesson regarding earthly and spiritual love. She begins the poem by cataloguing her personal sufferings at the hand of earthly love. Writing of earthly love, the poet feels constrained and trapped to the point of tears and death (6-7, above). The poetic trope of proclaiming one's love for a physical woman brings her no freedom or relief to her suffering. In fact, she declares that the traditional understanding of Love is "contrefaict" (5). She seeks a true expression of herself. However, she cannot achieve such honest self-evaluation through a conventional use of personified earthly Love that would apply to everyone generally. To do so would be counterfeit, a cheap substitute for the real thing.

The negative use of this word also serves to highlight the uncertainty with which the poet expresses her inner self because she is engaged in the precise activity she decries in this line. As mentioned above, most of Marguerite's *Chansons spirituelles* are *contrafacta*. They are secular

songs and melodies whose words have been altered to promote a Christian message. This poem is no exception. Its melody comes from a song that speaks of the pain of physical love.⁹³

Marguerite here reconstructs Love as counterfeit by counterfeiting a song. In her effort to escape from the prison of traditional rhetorical devices, she uses them in reverse. In the original song, the writer complains of a personal love lost. He moves from his personal experience to extrapolate on the general nature of love and suffering in the human experience. Marguerite's poem, however, moves from general to personal. The song enlists an abstraction called "Love" and uses it as a front for presenting her own personal anguish and spiritual uncertainty. She thus subverts the use of personified abstractions in order to promote her own agenda and to explore her own feelings rather than connecting herself to a larger human experience.

This act highlights an important distinction between Marguerite's evangelical tendencies and a broader commitment to humanism that was emerging in society. Evangelical leaders often pointed to the original fallen condition of mankind as the source for all kinds of evils in the world. Any hope of spiritual enlightenment or advancement came only after the individual had died to him or herself. Marguerite was, of course, committed to this theology, as is evidenced by her poetry and prose works. In this poem, however, she resists the effacement of her own voice by manipulating conventional rhetorical tools. As she does, tension between her evangelical and humanistic tendencies emerge. Through this seeming duophonic dissonance, the text subtly harmonizes two conflicting messages.

This polyphony destabilizes the image of Marguerite's inner self as compared to the general model of humanity to which her individual experience is opposed. Furthermore, the poet

⁹³ Gaston Paris gives the lyrics (song number LXXXIII) in *Chansons du XVe siècle*, 1875, and Georges Dottin provides the melody in his edition of the *Chansons spirituelles* (182).

cleverly obfuscates the line between her evangelical and humanistic leanings and contributes to the emergence of what would become the fragmented self. In traditional poetic expression, Love generally produces the death of the poet – emotional, spiritual and sometimes physical. The outcome is fairly standard, and the poet’s languishing is to be expected. As Marguerite reorients the abstraction of Love around her own personal experience, however, the resulting song threatens this result on several levels.

First, the poetic voice in the current poem experiences an intellectual revival that comes as a result of knowing perfect Love. According to the poem,

Amour parfaict
 Me donne congnoissance
 De son effect
 Et très grande puissance. (8-11)

She understands more than she did before. The traditional understanding of Love as physical and temporal leads the poet to “oubliance” (14) a few lines later. The poem contrasts the emptying of the mind through the traditional understanding of physical Love with the more complete knowledge that is the effect of perfect Love’s ability to transform the believer. As the two Loves interact with and contradict one another, the reader is thrown into a somewhat confusing situation. The poem introduces ambiguity into the text by expressing its subject’s “unique” experiences and desires at the hands of a “generalized” abstraction of earthly Love. Love is at once embraced and rejected by the poetic subject. Extending the poetic subject to a “self” as a place where these generalized ideas of Love interact, boundaries between the personal and the general become inherently less clear.

Going one step further, delineations between the “self” and other selves are also blurred. What the poem proclaims as a personal and intimate experience is stretched to include all humanity. As it serves as an avenue for individual expression, the poem simultaneously erodes the difference between personal and general, anecdotal and exemplary. Superficially read, the individual’s experience with Divine Love serves to create the notion of a personal understanding of and relationship with God. The text hints at the mutability and unstable nature of this relationship between the Divine Other and the individual self. Yet it also points to its subject as a model to be followed and reproduced in others’ lives. Thus, the text also problematizes and calls into question the very boundaries it established between the self and others.

Another result of this new presentation of the self is the dominance of the first-person subject. The putative aim of the poem (to teach that death of self is the ultimate way of salvation) is undermined by the poet’s constant presence and ultimate resuscitation. In the final lines of the poem, the subject undermines her status as passive recipient of Love’s actions:

Amour, mon Dieu,
 En ma mort me visite;
 En son doux feu
 A m’esveiller m’excite,
 Dont peu à peu
 A l’aymer tant m’incite;
 Enfin me resucite. (50-56)

This reconstituted self stands in contrast to the dying vision the poet paints of herself under the influence of earthly love in the preceding stanza. She decries this love as an

Amour menteur
 De mon ame a ravie
 Du Createur
 L'amour et sainte envie;
 C'est inventeur
 Qui a tout mal commis
 Enfin me oster la vie. (43-49)

This love is false and causes her to suffer. Instead of finding peace and security, she feels constantly under threat of violence. Though this love takes away the life of the poet, the outcome is not what typical evangelical doctrine would suggest. Through death, the individual is to be united with Christ and loses herself in Him. This poem's speaker's experience does not exactly follow that pattern. Though her God revives and resurrects her, she does not disappear from the poem. In fact, she takes center stage.

The fact that it is possible for her to love (55) raises her from the dead (56). Death no longer carries the negative connotations that accompanied it in the first stanza. There, death was a result of impure, physical love. In this stanza, perfect love comes to the subject in her death and revitalizes her. From her connection with Love, the subject actually starts to love herself. As she personalizes abstract Love, she finds life and the ability to engage in poetic expression. Repeating stagnant conventions leads to inability to express one's self. Manipulating, reversing and personalizing these conventions quicken the soul and the pen. The death of the poet translates to the silence at the end of the poem. Her death, however, is in fact the beginning of life for the poem itself. In rejecting the clarity and coherence that traditional uses of allegory

would have provided, the poem causes the reader to reflect on the nature of the self in relation to the subject.

Of course, the presence of this literary subject threatens some understandings of religious experience. As I have already pointed out, evangelicals often mistrusted the soul because of its penchant to sin and its corrupted nature. The fallen individual is unable to do good, as the apostle writes, “Scio enim quia non habitat in me, hoc est in carne mea, bonum” (Rom. 7:18). Both Luther and Calvin denounced the human heart as inherently wicked. Luther states that the “soul is full of sins, condemnation and damnation” (*On Christian Liberty*, 19). Only by denying oneself and one’s own ability to save oneself can salvation be found. Calvin was also antagonistic to human agency. The lyric voice of the devotional poetry currently under consideration is a seeming contradiction to this firmly held Protestant belief and places Marguerite firmly within the bounds of the Catholic Church’s understanding of freewill.

Marguerite creates a space for a free-speaking and thinking individual and forces her speaker to exist simultaneously within and without him or herself, thus paving the way for a more complete understanding of the self by early humanists. The emergence of the “je” in these poems introduces a constantly shifting vantage point from which to assess the self. In a back-and-forth motion, the poems present the doctrine of Christian self-denial and the hallmark self-affirmation of humanism. The personification of the two Loves manipulates the divided self of the poet. They highlight the contradictory forces at work in the construction of the poem. The interior conflict works itself out on the page, and the “je” of the poem finds itself trapped between desire to die and the experience of writing. The poet and the reader are left at the end of the poem without a clear conviction of who this “je” is both, dead and resurrected, silent and speaking, effaced and present. In a striking line, the poet recognizes the separating effects of the

spiritual Love that “D’Adam me desracine” (42). Union with Christ in this “Amour très doulx” (36) strips her of connection to the rest of fallen humanity. This love, “[q]ui de tous coups” (38), continually pulverizes her sense of identity and humanness and would seem to silence her. The end result, as I have shown, is not silence.⁹⁴ The speaker refuses to yield her identity to a speechless death, for she finds herself invigorated at the close of the poem. God visits her in death and emancipates her in the same way she has freed herself and her voice from poetic convention while working within it. Thus the “je” of the poem and Marguerite the author find themselves speaking with more, rather than less, individuality while trying to submit to the ultimate authority of God’s Word.

Self-dialogue and Introspection

Just as these reformulations of personified abstractions question the individuality and location of the self, they also hint at a tension between the first-person subject in the poem and the desire to define the self by suggesting a multiplicity of forces that shape the poet’s identity rather than one oppressive or controlling outside force as the source of one’s identity.

Considering the notion of self-fashioning, Stephen Greenblatt writes that it “is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic,

⁹⁴ I agree with Robert Cottrell in *The Grammar of Silence* when he concludes that “[t]he conflict between composing autonomous texts while maintaining a Christian submission to authority informs the problematic of writing in Marguerite’s poetry and reflects a tension between love for the creature and love for the Creator” (307). Many times, this tension remains eerily unresolved in a strained silence in her songs. This *chanson*, however, evidences that his emphasis on the submissive, quiet side of her writing is not always applicable. In fact, as Edwin Duval notes in “Marot, Marguerite le chant du cœur: Formes lyriques et formes de l’intériorité,” conviction of sin drives the sinner to silence in her plays. When she realizes her bleak condition before God she has nothing to say, but this silence gives way to song. Giving voice to oneself in lyrical poetry becomes the most persuasive way to effectuate “non seulement la communication mais la communion, et même la conversion” (570).

savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed” (9).⁹⁵

I propose that the self in Marguerite’s poetry is not so easily defined. It cannot be neatly opposed to some outside force. Marguerite the poet sees identity as more of a set of questions that result in differing relations between the self and those on the outside.⁹⁶ For the self in Marguerite’s poetry, the ultimate goal is to be effaced and to allow God, His Love and the resurrected Christ to take center stage. Yet, it is the subject in this poem that lives to speak of her experiences and her resurrection, leaving open the question of the true nature of the self. Marguerite de Navarre’s poem represent an inward refocusing of self-fashioning in that the narrator casts the Other as her own soul. The Other is internal and must be removed from the inside out. However, the only way to start the process would be to step outside of oneself. The poems become a way to create and define this interior Other in order to annihilate it. The problem for Marguerite is that no matter what steps she takes to destroy herself in her poetry what she produces is marked by that which she seeks to efface.

One way her poems highlight this tension is through the use of dialogue. Renaissance theoreticians speak of the dialogue as a genre in which “[t]he poet is both a seer into the nature of things and a ‘maker’ of fictitious form” and that “requires adherence to rhetorical precepts and a creative use of established motifs, topics, techniques, and structures” (Gilman 7 & 8)⁹⁷ Most dialogues consist of two speakers or groups representing two philosophical points of view. The

⁹⁵ Greenblatt’s theories of the self and of self-fashioning are, evidently, influential in this discussion. While Greenblatt focuses on an external or ‘foreign’ Other, I highlight Marguerite’s tendency towards an increasingly internalized sense of the alien.

⁹⁶ This concept forms the nexus of John Jefferies Martin’s argument in his book, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*. Marguerite, of course, predates Montaigne, whom Martin points to as the one would bring into clearer focus this notion of multiple identities.

⁹⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the genre see Bowen, Kushner (“Le Dialogue en France de 1550 à 1560”), and McClelland.

poet represents these competing ideas through the words of his or her imagined interlocutors.

The genre hovers between the fictional world the author proposes and the non-fictional ideas that are the subject of debate. Invented speakers engage one another and question one another to arrive at truth.

Critics note the dialogic nature of much of the Queen of Navarre's poetry as well as her prose.⁹⁸ In Marguerite's poems, self-interrogation, as opposed to the more traditional dialogue between two distinct interlocutors noted above, further destabilizes and scissions the self. By casting the poetic voice as an outside observer to and reporter of her own inner psychological experiences, Marguerite's texts challenge the reader's ability to distinguish between the poetic subject and the self. In "Vray Dieu, qui reconfortera" (Chanson 24), the poem's subject takes the role of an investigator who poses a series of questions and hypothetical situations regarding her own soul. There is a constant shifting of perspective that insists on inconsistencies and ineffaceable ruptures between what is represented or desired and what is real or experienced. As the subject writes about her own soul, she receives no voiced response from the soul, and she is forced to offer possible solutions and outcomes based on proposed courses of action. The silence of the soul foreshadows the work of God in her, yet it is the subject who ends the poem with a promise of future rejoicing on the soul's part. The lyric first-person speaker becomes at once separate from and connected to the object of her analysis. She speaks of her soul as an entity upon which she looks, commenting on her own damnation apart from God's grace as though she is an outside observer and questioning her own standing before God as well as her role in the creation and salvation of her own identity as it relates to others around her.

⁹⁸ See *Grammar* (131) and Winn ("Toward a Dialectic of Reconciliation").

The poem begins with the poet expressing her concern for her own soul when she asks, “Vray Dieu, qui reconfortera / Ma povre ame; et qui l’ostera / De la peur d’estre condamnée?” (1-3). With these words, she immediately divides herself from her soul. Her “unfortunate” soul is to be pitied because of its hopeless condition. It is clear that the poet sees herself as an outside observer. She is looking in on her soul and expressing its inner fears in her words. The soul is silent concerning itself, and it is the poet who speaks for the soul. There is no doubt in the reader’s mind at this point as to the nature of the poet’s concern. Her pain is of a different nature than the soul’s. The speaker’s anguish comes from her desire to grant a reprieve to the soul from its suffering. Paradoxically, she speaks of her own soul as distinct from herself.

Even though the speaker in the poem separates herself from her soul in order to analyze it and behold it as a sort of objectified version of herself, the soul that the poem’s speaker sees is not an exact mirror-image representation of herself.⁹⁹ This difference between the soul and the self looks forward to a postmodern construction of the individual as constituted in, through and because of interaction with the other. In order to examine herself and set herself free from guilt and sin, the speaker must separate her soul from her body and mind in order to analyze it. She must imagine the possibility of undoing and dismantling herself. She must set her soul free from the confines of her physicality. She does so by engaging in an inquisitorial process that culminates in her becoming the self-reflective subject of the poem. As the poem progresses, the reader observes an increasing sense of self-consciousness that transcends the medieval concept of the self as confined within the body.

⁹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the postmodern theories of the self and their relationship to literature, see Foucault’s *La Pensée du dehors*. For a specific investigation of self and the necessity of the Other to achieve self-knowledge see, *L’Herménutique du sujet*. In this work, Foucault states that any self-identification requires the outside, “disinterested” love of a *philosophos* to make possible a reflection or doubling of the true self (58) and specifically attaches this doubling to the work of Montaigne in the sixteenth century. I argue here that the ambiguous nature of the self in Marguerite de Navarre’s poems prefigures Montaigne’s *irrésolution*.

That said, the soul is linked both corporeally and psychologically to the body and mind through desire and emotion. The perceived movement in the poem from more to less doubt about the speaker's eternal condition deceives the reader if one takes it at face value, for in order to attain the peace and eternal tranquility that is the ostensible goal of this interrogation, the speaker must return to her body and reunite the body, soul and mind in oneness with the divine. It is impossible for the speaker to construct a seamless self without incorporating both the corporeal and reflective dimensions of an individual.

Marguerite creates a "self" in this poem by forging two distinct entities. The relational self of the soul provides form and a framework for the development of the sense of spiritual bankruptcy nagging at the speaker. Tempering the propensity of the emotional soul to completely lose itself in the divine other, the reflective self of the detached interrogator remains steadfast and almost stagnant throughout the poem – unchanged and unchanging. In so doing, she creates a new image of her own soul, one that is full of anxiety and torment over her own guilt. As the soul in this poem is subjected to the constant surveillance, questioning and correcting of the speaker, it is reduced to a silent, unresponsive entity. Michel Foucault similarly argues that the self is not born in a state of guilt but is brought about by the outside forces of power constantly constraining and directing it toward a certain moral or philosophical standard (*Discipline* 29). Marguerite thus simultaneously erases and writes herself into her oeuvre by establishing these two selves and maintains the balance between her evangelical/mystical longing to lose herself in Christ and the culpability that accompanies her drive to give her own voice authorial power.

As noted above, the poem begins with the speaker taking a step outside herself to look in on her own soul. The speaker in this poem studies her own soul, replacing the mirror of the scriptures with the speaker's omniscience. In so doing, Marguerite establishes a complex state of

being in the poem that is dependent upon a dual image of the self. First, the poem presents the soul as condemned (3) and justly damned (6) but unaware of its current state. The soul believes that its good works (“bienfaits” in line 10) will procure ultimate salvation; it is unable to see that it is “[p]leine de mal, vuyde de bien” (13). The one gazing upon her soul can see that it is wicked and unworthy of God’s grace. Troubled by this image, the speaker contrasts it to the vision of the soul at the end of the poem. Here, she sees the redeemed soul is beautiful and has entered a sublime (29) state of deliverance (25) and grace (26). The speaker at once gazes upon her present and future self and paints a two-sided portrait of herself that condemns the evil inherent in her and calls her soul to account for the state in which it finds itself.

This dual self-image is not, of course, unique to Marguerite. It finds its roots in the writings of Augustine and other church fathers who exhorted believers to consider themselves in light of the mirror of Scripture. As highlighted earlier, Augustine believed that Christians must turn the light of God’s Word on their souls in order to understand who they are and what they need to do to move toward redemption.¹⁰⁰ Given the particular evangelical penchant to align with Augustine’s teaching, Marguerite’s modification of this principle is surprising and could be seen as contradicting the principle of *sola scriptura*. It is the speaker in Marguerite’s poems who displaces sacred writings with her own self-knowledge in this poem; it is she who reveals the true nature of the soul to itself.

¹⁰⁰ One of his more famous and extended considerations of the importance of Scripture in redemption is found in his *Expositions of the Psalms*. Speaking to the Church as the Bride of Christ, in 103.1.4 Augustine writes, “Your first duty is therefore to see clearly what you are; that will deter you from going in your ugliness to receive the kisses of the beautiful bridegroom. ‘But where shall I look, to see myself?’ you ask. He has provided his scriptures as a mirror for you, and there you are told, *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). In that text a mirror is held out to you. See whether you are one of the pure-hearted it mentions, and grieve if you are not yet like that; grieve in order to become so.

The mirror will reflect your face to you. You will not find the mirror flattering you, and neither must you beguile yourself. The reality that is yourself, that is what the mirror shows forth. Look at what you are, and if what you see disgusts you, seek to become otherwise. If in your ugly condition you find yourself repulsive, you are already pleasing to your beautiful bridegroom.” (*Expositions* 110-11).

Certainly, it cannot be denied that God is the One who ultimately does the work of salvation and His Word has informed her of her soul's condition.¹⁰¹ The speaker recounts her hope that for her soul

Ce sera Grace purement
 De Dieu par Christ, son vray amant,
 Qui pour luy l'a predestinée.

 Cestuy seul la delivrera,
 Et sa Grace luy livrera

 Pour de tous biens estre estrenée. (22-7)

The speaker says that God is the source of deliverance, but the poem slyly acknowledges the speaker as the one who sees the true state of her soul. Her spiritual transformation is a result of her inherent knowledge of herself. It is only by presenting the negative self-image alongside the idealized future version of the soul that the speaker makes her inner self aware of the need to be transformed by the power of God. This self-realization is made possible when the poetic voice steps outside itself and casts a third-person gaze upon her own soul and calls its attention to the incongruities between what is and what should be or what is desired. She must trespass the boundary between body and soul and remove herself from her body in order to activate her spiritual transfiguration.¹⁰² As she does so, her voice and the voice of God begin to meld. She speaks for Him, and her poetry begins to do His work.

¹⁰¹ I do not claim that Marguerite forsakes the Word of God, but the Scriptures' role in these poems becomes more ambiguous and melded with the voice of the speaker in such a way that distinguishing between the two becomes problematic. Furthermore, this interesting mix of voice tends to subvert the dominant evangelical message concerning the supremacy of the Word of God and provides for a space where Marguerite's own voice surfaces.

¹⁰² In an Augustinian view of redemption, it would be God who inspects the sinner and reveals his fallen state. Citing Augustine's exposition of Psalm 103: "He who is beautiful, he who is *fair of form beyond all the children of*

After taking the vantage point of an outside observer at the beginning of the poem, the speaker sees her inner self as damned and damnable. Once the soul meets God and His grace delivers the soul from its corporeal prison, the speaker gains an idealized perspective of her soul. As noted in the lines above, at the moment of conversion and new birth, the poet acknowledges God's role in her redemption. This new self-image is in accord with God's predetermined will and the remade soul is now worthy to be the bride of Christ. Through this new vision of itself, the speaker's soul, once full of "ords et infects" works (10), is forced to consider an alternate path to salvation. The soul cannot meet the requirements of its Judge (8); it stands guilty because it is trying to earn its salvation through its own righteousness. God rejects the life lived outside of His grace. The path of trusting in one's works will not lead to forgiveness, but this information is alien and alienating to the soul, for it is still entrapped by its own blindness. It is only through the act of stepping outside oneself and the idealized self-vision thus obtained that the soul can assimilate the lesson of divine grace and not works and reap the resulting benefits.

This idea of a split subjectivity is key to understanding Marguerite's poetic dilemma. She is interested in expressing the inexpressible. Because of this, she chooses to write about herself as an inarticulate lyric subject. She becomes the object of her own observation and analysis. By narrativizing her inner psychological workings, she in a very real sense gains some power over them. As an outside observer, she can present herself as an objective cataloguer of what would otherwise be the inner, individual turmoil of a sinner writhing from concerns over her own

men because more just than any of the children of men, he came to the ugly one to make her beautiful. And that is not all; I will say something more daring still, since I find it in scripture: to make her beautiful he became ugly himself" (*Expositions* 111). In Marguerite's poem, she inspects herself, paints her own soul to be ugly and then cleanses herself through her poetry. This idea of evangelical self-scrutiny will be extended and elaborated by English Protestant writers John Buyan (*Grace Abounding*, 1666) and George Fox (*Journal*, 1694). Marguerite's *chansons* stand in stark contrast to what Stephen Greenblatt finds in sixteenth-century England where he says there is "a powerful ideology of inwardness but few sustained expressions of inwardness that may stand apart from the hated institutional structure [of the Catholic church]" (85).

damnation. She constructs a voice with which to publish what were until now her soul's voiceless fears. By casting her soul as the object of her instruction and stepping outside the poem, Marguerite actually gives herself a new voice. She undergoes a poetic self-annihilation that results in her own rebirth.

This new self defies definition because she no longer exists within the poem. She can only live vicariously through the feelings of her soul. In fact, the physical body is no longer of use to the poet or to the soul.

Ce ne sera pas son bon sens,
Ne sa raison ny ses cinq sens,
Quand elle sera adjournée. (19-21)

The physical world in and of itself is a dead end. There is no hope of redemption by relying on one's own powers to escape condemnation. Ultimate truth transcends the physical. In order to discover and understand this truth, then, the poet must necessarily step outside of her own body and separate herself from it, for the body is a source of destruction and death from the poet's point of view. She wonders aloud about her soul and "Qui la delivrera du corps / De ceste mort, où sera lors / En trouble et douleur amenée" (16-18). She equates death with the body. The physical frame is a prison from which the soul needs to be liberated in order to escape persistent feelings of condemnation. In the same way, the poet must free herself from the constraints of her own soul in order to give voice to her inner emotions, in order to examine her inner self. Unity between the corporeal and the psychological must be severed to achieve spiritual enlightenment and joy, just as unity between poet and poetic subject must be disjoined for this poem to be written.

A similar disembodiment occurs in the *chanson* preceding the one studied above. This time, however, the speaker directly interrogates her soul rather than simply speaking about it to God and the soul is given a voice in the poem. Whereas the former poem juxtaposes current reality with an idealized vision of potential reality, this one takes a more Calvinistic stance in that it focuses more on the negative aspects of the soul's fallen nature. The dialogue between the poet and her soul represents an attempt to align the self with God's commandments and, in so doing, change the image the speaker has of herself.

Chanson 23 accomplishes this transformation through a series of questions posed directly to the speaker's soul, the accompanying responses and a didactic exhortation provoked by the incorrect/immoral response. In this way, the speaker is able to see the image of herself as a willing lawbreaker and converse with herself in an effort to reprove and refashion her reality. In essence, the self becomes a "witness" against itself and, thus, allows Marguerite to circumvent the problem of inconsistency that Paul describes in chapter seven of the epistle to the Romans.¹⁰³ She is one with her soul and able to objectively testify against it. The ignorant soul is devoid of understanding of the true nature of its sinful path. In the first exchange, the speaker asks her soul where it is rushing ("où vas tu sy soudain" 5), and the soul responds that she is running toward "plaisir mondain" (6). The speaker then explains the vanity of such pursuits for the short-lived joy they offer end only in "tristesse et tous maux" (10). The enlightened speaker informs the soul of unbeknownst dangers concerning this and other sinful pursuits. She demonstrates the worthlessness of earthly goods (13), honor (20), knowledge (27) and worldly friendships (24). In each case, she asks her soul a question and then gives a Scripturally-reasoned answer as to why

¹⁰³ In Romans 7:15-17, Paul writes, "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

each response is futile. By providing a view of reality that the soul is currently incapable of seeing on its own, the speaker hopes to bring her soul into the idealized self-image established in the first stanza.

The poem begins with the narrator expressing concern over her soul's condition and sketching a path to true happiness. The speaker says,

Ame tu n'es au chemin

Ny en la voye

De vraye felicité

Dieu t'y convoye. (1-4)

In so doing, she makes reference to Christ who is the Way to salvation and to union with God, and she underscores her own desire to enjoy true happiness.¹⁰⁴

The words that she speaks cannot bring joy to the hearer. It is the Living Word of God that revives the soul and brings eternal life. She underscores the fact that it is God who ultimately directs the soul. The narrator presents her soul with the bleak reality of its current condition (and/or an idealized self-image as in the poem examined earlier), but God must make the pedagogy efficacious for the transformation of the self. The poet makes clear that her role is to present the possibility of change, the occasion for grace to work. What she writes to her soul and her desires are but instruments God may use to give life as only He can.

What reality is and what the narrator wants are two different things. The soul (as the object of the speaker's observation and interrogation) seems to be oblivious to its own condition

¹⁰⁴ See John 14:6 where Jesus claims, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

and the true desire of the speaker. Marguerite sets up a propositional mode of self-awareness that maintains the subject-object split by separating the enlightened subject from the studied or understood object. The soul is moved from an unknowable entity to an observable object. Subjectivity is located not in the speaker's relationship to actual self-images as embodied in her soul but in its unrealized relationship with idealized ones based on revealed truth. Desire to do and be right is the one fixed point of Marguerite's subjectivity.

Though this desire leads to the evangelical instruction in the poem, the concern that drives the speaker to warn her soul of its impending destruction is the last vice that she attacks.

The argument goes:

Ame, où vas tu, par ta foy?
 Je vois à l'amour de moy:
 Garde toy
 D'aymer ce que rien ne vault:
 Si tu sçavoye
 L'amour et le don d'enhault,
 Seul l'aymeroye. (40-46)

While it is forbidden to the soul that it should love itself, the entire poem is built upon the premise that the poet's concern for her soul is not only acceptable but is what God Himself wants for the soul. In this final stanza, the narrator reveals that the soul is worth nothing (43) and admonishes against any self-love as she proclaims the vanity of all such infatuation and demonstrates the surpassing value of divine love.

The poet, in effect, undermines her motives for confronting the soul and writes herself out of the poem – or, rather, she assumes God’s place in the salvation process thus giving herself more of a voice than would at first appear. As the soul obtains more complete self-knowledge through the narrator’s revelations, it is important to remember that Marguerite viewed any such understanding as a result of divine grace. The fundamental relation between the gazing individual and her own (idealized) self is based on an attraction that is a gift from God. Any subjectivity that results from such an exchange in reality is God’s and is assumed by the poet.

For Marguerite, this poses an immense problem. For in essence, her poetry here eradicates the humanity of the individual and somehow transforms the subject into a god through self-desiring subjectivity. According to evangelical doctrine, however, God wills that humans turn from their sin and cast themselves upon His grace and thus return to a prelapsarian state in full fellowship with Him. The fall left humanity not only separated from God but also confined to the prison of selfish desire. Paradoxically, this self-love in the form of self-knowledge is the key to its own undoing and restoration of the relationship God intended between Himself and His creation.¹⁰⁵ Marguerite’s poems negotiate this difficulty by removing self from the position of subject and placing the soul as the object of the narrator’s gaze and instruction, simultaneously erasing and establishing her voice and authority as the text seeks to efface the fallen soul and replace it with an idealized self-image fashioned after God’s likeness. In order to negotiate this tension, Marguerite relies on her rhetorical prowess and turns to describing her soul in a more allegorical fashion.

Landscapes and the Self

¹⁰⁵ Augustine stresses this, for example, in *Sermon 96* where he expresses the absolute necessity of studying oneself and considering the value that God places on the individual believer. See 96.2.

Insisting on this dual nature of the self, Marguerite's poetry also proposes landscapes as a means to integrate these two aspects of her conception of the individual, for it is through the representation of landscapes that Marguerite clearly communicates the experience of her inner world and its relationship to the larger environment around her. As one observes various speakers in her poems wandering through different geographies, a sense of interiority as expressed through the exterior, physical environment emerges. At the same time, the poet clearly hesitates to establish firm boundaries between her inner self and the external world of experience. The two are in constant dialogue with each other throughout the poems. The Queen of Navarre's concern regarding the interaction between these two aspects of her individuality and its relationship to the material world stems from the influence of Neoplatonism which holds that the ability to represent one's physical environs recalls not only the fact that humans bear God's image; it also reflected humanity's creative power. One of the most significant influences in Marguerite's aesthetic is the Italian Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino, who writes,

Since man has observed the order of the heavens, when they move, whither they proceed and with what measures, and what they produce, who could deny that man possesses as it were almost the same genius as the Author of the heavens? And who could deny that man could somehow also make the heavens, could he only obtain the instruments and the heavenly material, since even now he makes them, though of a different material, but still with a very similar order. (235)

Of course, Marguerite is not concerned with representing heavenly bodies in orbit. She does, however, write a lengthy poem set in the mountains and spends many lines mapping out the pastoral landscapes around her. As with the other literary devices she employs, the poet takes the pastoral genre and makes it her own to exhibit and to examine herself. The mountainous

wilderness of Marguerite de Navarre's poetry, as tradition would dictate, is a place where lovers meet to enjoy ecstatic union. The participants in this love story, however, are not lusty shepherds seeking fulfillment at the expense of some naïve victim upon a verdant hill. Instead, the poem tells the story of the spiritual journey of a wandering vagrant and calls attention to the overwhelming presence of the lover that makes any desolate landscape seem inviting.

In order to demonstrate how Marguerite takes the genre and reinvigorates it with her own voice, it is first necessary to define it. The term "pastoral" eludes quick and straightforward classification. However, it is basically comprised of bucolic images often evoked from the past or some idealized version thereof. Typical characters include shepherds and shepherdesses (and sometimes nobles trying to take advantage of peasants). Though there are many variations on the pastoral genre, it has long been held that its "method or perspective" is one that idealizes certain aspects of rural landscapes and highlights the beauty and transformational powers of the countryside.¹⁰⁶ The ambience of the rural surroundings often calms and liberates the inhabitants and those who travel through the open spaces bringing them into a more natural state. This well-documented phenomenon of affective topography in which a literary space takes on characteristics of the subject's actual or desired psychological state corresponds to the human need to map out or understand what is transpiring in the human psyche.¹⁰⁷

Tom Conley reaffirms this connection between early modern French poetry and topography in his book *An Errant Eye* wherein he states that "the poet is like a cartographer insofar as it is his or her task to describe the world by mixing images, visual designs, and both aural and optical traits of language" (3). He goes on to point specifically to the *Marguerites de la*

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed study of the pastoral genre from its Roman beginnings see Leach.

¹⁰⁷ Several studies have demonstrated the early modern fascination with maps and geography and their correlation with contemporary conceptions of the human psyche. See, for example, Chevalier and Fu.

Marguerite des princesses (among other works) as a work in which “locale is crucial to the grounding vision and design” (19) and links self-study and topography in the works of contemporaries of the Queen such as Maurice Scève and later writers including Ronsard, Du Bellay and Montaigne.

According to an engaging article by Rosanna Gorris Camos, this desire to find analogues between oneself and one’s surroundings often plays itself out in literary descriptions of mountains. Particularly, she argues that the relationship between mountainous scenery and mental anguish has allowed authors to explore complex dialectics such as that between desire and fear or between death and silence (“Monts”). At once inspiring creativity and personal expression, mountains can also be full of danger and drive those who choose to brave them into a paralyzed silence. Gorris Camos comments that no matter what one’s reaction to the foreboding heights, they have long been considered “un lieu fort de l’expérience humaine, mystérieux et provocatoire, lieu d’ascèse et d’initiation, de mort et de naissance, d’épreuves et de défis extrêmes qui rapprochent l’homme de la divinité et de lui-même” (“Monts” 154). Biblical authors have treated the mountains as both a place of refuge (David’s consistent metaphor for divine protection being a “rock”) and frightful judgment (God’s law and wrath being demonstrated through thunder and lightning as well as threats of death and damnation to any who would dare approach Mount Sinai). Speaking of the development of mountain imagery through the sixteenth century, Yvonne Bellenger has argued that at “[...] un certain moment, vers la fin du XVI^e siècle, ils [authors] ont changé de modèles pour se mettre à aimer la montagne et ses paysages”(130). I argue below that Marguerite’s unique blending of the horror and glory of mountain experiences in the *Chansons spirituelles* represents a significant movement toward that “moment.”

Full of contradiction and interdiction, mountains make the ideal setting for Marguerite's pastoral poetry. As seen above, the notion Marguerite has of the self in these songs is dialectic and multi-faceted. It is instable, and the poetic voice in many of the poems is uncertain of where her "soul" stands from one moment to the next. Try as she might to control her relationship to the world around her and to the Divine Other, she always seems to be incapable of creating a fixed self-image. One of her longer *chansons* tells the story of a wanderer who finds herself on a mountain. The subject of the poem, known to the teller of her story as "la malheureuse," inhabits a bleak landscape along with birds of prey, other beasts and harbingers of death and misfortune.

Marguerite maps out the inner turmoil she experiences by means of this threatening mountainous terrain. As Gorris Comos has noted, "Les montaignes sont le point final d'un processus qui conduit l'homme au sommet de son itinéraire existentiel, de son ascension, difficile mais nécessaire" ("Monts" 155). They are the place of self-knowledge and understanding as well as obstacles to the same. In this poem, the speaker's spiritual struggle is played out in the third person as she describes the perilous journey of a vagrant wanderer over the rugged and barren landscape. The mountain is, of course, a religious symbol. It is a place where ultimately the protagonist draws near to God and moves from being unhappy to spiritually fulfilled in the Divine Presence. It would be foolish to discard this interpretation. Alongside that hermeneutic axis, the poem also presents an attempt to describe the interior struggle the poet is having with her "self" as an author desiring to write. The mountain simultaneously represents the place of that struggle and the struggle itself. In addition to seeing Marguerite's landscape as a mapping out a way to God, it is possible to interpret it as a map of her inner self (both actual and idealized) as she struggles with the notions of authority, subjectivity and identity. In this way, Marguerite's work suggests another step toward modern ideas of perspective and subjective

authority. Marguerite the author serves as the guide through this unforgiving landscape, but her perspective is not univocal. Instead, she presents to the reader many different aspects of her interior world, reflecting the uncertainty she experiences as an author and as a believer in the midst of shifting religious waves.

She begins by inviting the reader to join her as she searches for the *malheureuse* (1). She is not the only one looking for this poor wanderer, for she quickly relates that “tous ennuis” are also in pursuit (2). The poem’s narrator quickly demonstrates her intimate knowledge of the psychological and affective goings on of the unhappy pilgrim when she says she desires no good (3) and does not want even to draw near to joy (4). With such understanding, the speaker shares a god-like power to gaze into the thoughts and desires of the one she describes, and it is clear that she is presenting more than just a simple story of someone’s mountain trip. Furthermore, it seems that the narrator has asked a question she knows the answer to, for in the next stanza, she tells the reader that the object of her inquiry is not “en la plaine / De propre delectation, / Elle s’en va en la Montaigne / De toutte tribulation” (5-9). Indeed, she unveils an intimate knowledge of what is (and is not) on these mountains in the lines that follow. For example, she testifies to the absence of others on the mountain (9) as well as the nature of the area’s flora and fauna (13-20, 25-35) indicating that she has explored the region in order to authoritatively speak to what is and is not there.

Even from the beginning, the narrator orients the landscape around the *malheureuse* by relating the experience of the mountains from her point of view. The subject of the poem moves fearfully about the physical environment the poem describes. She is running, leaving, coming, going. Verbs of motion dominate the poem’s opening. For example, forms of *venir*, *chercher*, *approcher*, *s’en aller*, and *fuir* all appear in the first twelve lines. It is a dizzying experience to

follow the erratic movements of this object of the narrator's search. The blurred vision caused by the restlessness of the peripatetic wanderer results in an incomplete and fragmented picture of the mountain. It becomes a place of near raving, a void, empty of any sign of order or purpose. The obscurity of the mountain also leaves the reader with limited perspective and a sense of mystery as to the exact nature of this imposing ridge. The emphasis on the psychological processes at work in the main character pulls the reader to move from a solely exterior focus to an interior investigation. Using what is visible to point to what is unseen, the poem infuses the mountain with symbolic meaning. Read as a map of her emotional and psychological processes, these first notions of surroundings come through a jostled, displaced point of view and emphasize the *malheureuse's* inherent instability as well as her inability to move purposefully.

Yet even in this nomadism, there is a sense of direction. The poet is clear that the wanderer is fleeing her own satisfaction. She turns away from any experience that would bring her joy. She is not to be found "en la plaine / De propre delectation" (5-6). This flat ground where she could find peace and where her journey would not be so strenuous stands in sharp contrast to the rugged "montaigne / De toute tribulation" in the following two lines. The *malheureuse* deliberately chooses to roam these cliffs and seemingly rejects the calm of pleasure and delight.

The voice describing these mountains does not paint a precise picture of what they look like. Rather the reader is given a sampling of what occupies or is absent from the landscape. This non-portrait is not an attempt to render faithfully what the physical mountain does or does not look like. The narrator provides her impression of the environment through the use of images and sounds or silences that make up the fundamental essence of what the *malheureuse* is experiencing on the sterile peak. Qualities which both delineate and pixilate the countryside add

clarity and ambiguity to the scene being described. For example, highlighting the wanderer's solitude in this desolate wasteland, there is neither "homme ny femme" occupying this empty space (9). She has roamed outside the boundaries of human habitation. There is none to comfort her and there is no one who can understand her. The reader senses the loneliness of the situation, and this is highlighted by the fact that human beings do not even want to live on this mountain (10), yet she chooses to be here. She sets herself apart by desiring to be "en ce lieu saint" (11). Away from the known world, she enters a holy (set apart) place, void of humanity and full of holiness. Paradoxically, she knows where she is (away from all others) and is also completely in the dark as to her location and what awaits her.

Apart from humanity, the unhappy vagrant has no point of reference upon which to fix her emotions just as the narrator has no geographical landmarks upon which to fix her description. Consequently, it seems as though the space the *malheureuse* inhabits exceeds the narrator's ability to describe. The description then must not be limited to simple lines, measurements, and other physical landmarks. The narrator thus begins to catalogue the different animals conspicuously missing from the surroundings. By juxtaposing birds typically associated with love and sensual pleasure in traditional pastoral poetry and avian harbingers of death and decay that dominate this bleak landscape, the poem modifies its rhetorical model.¹⁰⁸ What comes out of this is a mountain that would normally promise life, love and happiness dominated by a darker range of mortality, annihilation and decomposition. This is the "lieu saint."

As has been pointed out, it is not unusual for Marguerite to evoke mountains as places where such odd pairings are common. Paula Sommers has commented on the ascending and

¹⁰⁸ Nightingale, lark, starling, magpie, jays, parrots, for example, are typical in medieval pastoral poems. They signify and sing of the (secret) meetings of lovers. The owl, night birds, ravens that inhabit the space in this poem speak, too, of the secrecy of night, but they connote a more negative aspect of death and dying that is generally absent from the verdant pastures of the established generic protocol.

descending movement in many of Marguerite's devotional poems. The heights Sommers describes are encounters with God. Her meditations do not rest upon the lowliness of humanity. Her eyes gaze upward to contemplate the grandeur of the Divine. In the *Heptaméron*, the faithful escape the floods by seeking refuge in an abbey on a hill. Additionally, it has also been demonstrated that elsewhere mountains for the Queen of Navarre were also frightful places and were used to allude to the "mystérieux secrets de l'homme et de la femme" (Gorris Camos "Monts" 160). Marguerite in *Les Prisons* descends to ponder the darker side of humanity and the *Heptaméron*, of course, is full of stories that highlight human tendencies toward pride, sensuality and deceitfulness.

It is not surprising that this mountain is a mixture of holiness and putrefaction. The persona is trapped between two worlds as she struggles with her nature and how to interact with the purity that God represents and that she desires. The mountain is a threatening place where omens of death await around every corner, but it is also a refuge of solitude to which one can withdraw from the exterior world of interaction with others. On the heights, the *malheureuse* is free to consider her *for intérieur*, and the reader who follows her there experiences the haunting sounds that imprison her innermost being. The mountain (and the world it contains) allow the poet to experience herself afresh and to know herself more completely than she did before.

These images of death and dying are also opposed to the creativity that the poem itself represents. Marguerite juxtaposes decay and burgeoning spiritual and artistic life. The voice that the *malheureuse* finds in the text emerges from a landscape of death and the poem is birthed in a tension filled space inhabited by antagonistic forces of destruction and creation. In effect, the narrator follows the vagrant and describes her death and rebirth. Theologically speaking, this is in line with what was discussed above (and in more detail in an earlier chapter) concerning

Marguerite's theological struggle with the idea of *sola scriptura*. Allowing only God to speak precludes the very human agency necessary to create the poem or text through which God would communicate His message. His Word requires the death of the one speaking so that He might be clearly heard. Yet the desire to write proceeds from this literary death. This poem is an attempt to describe the psychological and spiritual turmoil within a person in Marguerite's situation. It is her attempt to name that which defies definition. The mountain is the place in which her desire and her death meet, where her 'self' is conceived. Creating a world inhabited by images that signify what she describes and following an obscure path, the *malheureuse* arrives at a place where she is reborn herself and able to proclaim that which she was so unwilling to desire at the beginning of the *chanson*.

The journey towards this self-consciousness is taken up in the first lines. The fact that the narrator refuses to name death at the opening of the poem and chooses to avoid direct discourse allows an interior interpretation of the text. Through the eyes of the presenter, the reader sees threatening birds fly in and predict evil for the future (17-20). The landscape takes on the eerie melancholic cries of "reynes et chauves souris" that are opposed to the pleasure of laughter (21-23). The movement away from describing the mountain itself reveals the true object of the narrator's depiction. She does not refer to the rocks and ridges that compose and outline the landscape. Instead, she focuses on the inhabitants of the surroundings and the sounds and sights the unhappy traveler experiences. What is missing becomes just as important as what is present. The experience of the protagonist takes center stage, and the reader is pushed to more interior concerns. The symbolism of the landscape's inhabitants draws attention to the words being used to describe the mountain and the images they evoke.

The contrasts between the absent and the present continue throughout the poem and bring the reader into a cycle of non-being and being that reflects the interiorization of the mountain landscape. The narrator consistently juxtaposes opposites in the stanzas that make up the remainder of the poem. From the two types of birds already noted to the contrast between domesticated and wild animals (25-32), fruitful plants, blossoming flowers, fertile plains, and the barren wasteland (33-44), folly and wisdom (34-52) and so on, the poem becomes more about the inversion and enumeration of images. The scene is thus transformed from a physical description of a mountain, a natural landscape, to an imaginary place that is inside the mind of the *malheureuse*. The pictures the narrator lays before the reader are the objects and the subjects of her suffering and her writing.

This intensifies the sense of competing pressures on this mountain and in the mind of the wanderer. As the narrator catalogues each missing image of life and opposes it to a somber image of death and sterility, the landscape becomes the site of an internal poetic battle between the writer's desire to create and her drive to remove herself and her voice from her work. The alternating visions of the surroundings emulate the pulse of the competing drives within the *malheureuse*'s psyche. The mountain seems to mimic the exchange going on inside her mind – the swelling as ideas come to her and the repression as she yearns to write herself out of her poetry.

The narrator makes the reader aware that she is engaged in artifice. The specific mention of the absence of “ouvraiges” in line 57 and “tableau” and “pincture” in line 62 draws the distinction between the description of the landscape and the actual meaning behind the description and focuses the reader's attention on the words themselves. They are painting a picture in the reader's mind, but this picture does not exist in the *malheureuse*'s world. There are

no paintings or works of art that cause the inhabitants of this mountain to contemplate a Neoplatonic echo of “le bon et beau” (64). The text becomes a sign of something else, an indication that the reader should look beyond the literal meaning of the words to discover the true object being described in such detail.

That Marguerite also has in mind the writing process is evident in the poem when the narrator reveals that on the mountain

Là ne cr[o]ist papier, encre ou plume
 Pour escrire ce qu'elle veult,
 Ny livre, livret ny volume;
 Toutesfois elle ne s'en deult. (69-72)

These verses highlight (more than anywhere else in the song) that this poem must be read as a writer's interior struggle with the writing process. As Robert Cottrell has pointed out, the *Chansons spirituelles* all point to “[t]he conflict between composing autonomous texts while maintaining a Christian submission to authority [that] informs the problematic of writing in Marguerite's poetry and reflects a tension between love for the creature and love for the Creator” (*Grammar* 307). Furthermore, he notes that “Marguerite's poetry tends always toward a deconstruction of the visual, the concrete, the fleshy. Her landscapes are not of the outer world but of the inner world. The ultimate décor in all her poetry is the human heart” (236). He concludes that the Queen of Navarre's desires to write herself out of her poems in order to allow the Word of God to speak clearly through her. In this poem, the failure of writing silence takes center stage through the narration of the *malheureuse*'s unfortunate vagabonding. The images of

the writer's tools and the product of the writing process reorient the passage and allow not only a spiritual interpretation but this secular one as well.

Reading the poem in this way also elucidates some obtuse lines. For instance, the narrator signals that in addition to the haunting sounds of the aforementioned birds of bad omen, there is an absence of any domesticated animals that would indicate some kind of civilization. The animals she mentions in lines 25 and 26 “vache, / Beuf, brebis, chevre [...] mouton” are significant because they are all used in different kinds of sacrifices. In the Old Testament, God commanded that these animals be sin and guilt offerings when His people committed an offense against His Law. The scapegoat was of particular importance as each year, the high priest would lay his hands upon its head and transfer the sins of the entire nation upon the innocent animal which would then be set to wander the wastelands outside the camp. In this way, both sins of commission and sins of omission were atoned for and the people would be kept free from bearing the punishment of their own iniquities.

These animals represent the payment for sin and the way to freedom from guilt. As opposed to animals of death and decay, they are absent from the landscape the poet describes in this poem. Considering the interior repercussions of such absence, this mountain is one of continual culpability and the conscious awareness of this sense of sinfulness is oppressive. The *malheureuse* sees no means for ridding herself of the psychological and spiritual burden her sins cause her. Inspecting the bleak terrain for anything to relieve the anxiety of her condition results in only more despair. This mirrors the internal struggle early evangelicals were facing when they considered their sinful state before God. Without any good in themselves, they had no hope of earning God's favor through sacrifice or works of the Law. Another interpretive lens would also allow the reader to see the inner workings of an evangelical author, such as Marguerite, on

display in these lines. The Word of God being the only thing of substance one can say necessitates self-effacement in a text. It is entirely conceivable that in addition to describing her sinful state, she is also mapping the internal struggle she has within herself as she composes the poem. The mountain is then a space of death and life, a place where the poet dies to herself in an ostensible act of submission to God's Word and simultaneously finds a voice that is her own.

Even more alarming for such a wanderer (or an author or sinner) would be the fact that the only fauna she actually sees in this dark place is the "animal qui l'homme fache" (28). The wild animal "repare aumonier" among the jagged peaks (29). The act of writing creates a beast that opposes itself to humanity's civilized world. Humankind's best efforts to control it prove futile, and the anger that results is evident to the witness describing this mountain. This animal that maddens man introduces another level of obscurity to the picture being painted for the reader. As Michèle Clément notes in her edition of the *Chansons spirituelles*,

Le sens de ces deux vers est obscur, nous pouvons peut-être comprendre : dans cette montagne, « l'animal qui l'homme fache » (=bête sauvage) a son repaire (verbe « repaier ») et il y demande l'aumône, (=euphémisme quasi antiphrastique), c'est-à-dire exige un tribut (de chair et de sang); ce sens est possible du fait du sens d' « aumosnier » désignant voleur ou brigand. L'animal ici désigné est proche de la figure du monstre dans les légendes populaire (« ce dict-on ») (228).

Without denying the possibility Clément presents, I would add that the lines may be made less obtuse by keeping with my proposed reading of the poem. If the animals listed as absent from this scene are associated with sacrifice and a cleansing of one's conscience, the wild

animal could be a person's sinful nature that is opposed to God and that, according to Lutheran and Calvinistic teachings, makes any good on man's part impossible. Since no atonement could be made through the blood of the animals, the penalty to be paid is the death of the sinner. Her own flesh must be cut and her own blood spilled to pay for her guilt. This would keep in line with the senses of "tribute" and "aumosnier" that Clément raises as the Law requires the shedding of blood for the remission of sins and since the sinful soul is often compared to a thief and a villain. Mountains would be the place where both judgment and forgiveness meet.

Several of Calvin's sermons and writings point indirectly to mountains as both a place of judgment on such sinners and a place of mercy and transformation. Francis Higman has catalogued these references to mountains and demonstrated that, for Calvin, there is a constant dialectic between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (the new or heavenly Jerusalem in which Christ reigns and sets all things aright) ("Calvin"). In the end, literal mountains serve no purpose for the true believer. Higman concludes, "En fin de compte la pensée de Calvin fait abstraction de toute considération matérielle, visible, physique, de la montagne. Le symbolique du *Sursum corda* ('levez vos cœurs') et sa spiritualité abstraite ne laisse pas de place pour la montagne réelle, concrète, et menaçante; il reste uniquement le mont *céleste*" (85, author's emphasis).

Marguerite would embrace Calvin's teaching on this point. As I have shown, the mountain is at once a place of suffering and a place of spiritual rebirth. Marguerite's poem does not, however, entirely acquiesce to such an abstract or spiritualized view of the mountain. The pain and anguish the *malheureuse* experiences are too real to dismiss as pure symbolism. Indeed, the mountains in this text are pointing to something else, but it is not solely the heavenly mountains of the saint's peace and rest. Opposed to a purely Calvinistic view of the peaks, Marguerite's narrator proposes an actual physical space (even if she avoids describing a tangible

mountain). The vocabulary, though symbolic, does not permit a dismissal of all secular concerns from the poem for it points to very real animals and piercing sounds. The text permits a non-religious interpretation alongside its primary juxtaposition of law and grace.

The wild animal's presence would also be consistent with the other interpretation I propose, that of a writer mapping out her desire to write and her need for self-effacement. The temptation to let one's own voice be heard would tear at the author seeking to write silence. The animal within would be roaming around begging to be let out and angering the writer more as each moment passed.

This internal struggle between the author's desire to write and the necessary death to self problematizes the reader's understanding of and reaction to the poem. On one level, this internal struggle simplifies the description. If the reader accepts the proposed interpretation, it would follow from Cottrell's analysis that the text would finish as a "linguistic cenotaph" in which "Marguerite refuses to tell a story and, thus, present a forward-moving narrative" (*Grammar* 219).¹⁰⁹ One would expect to see a *malheureuse* at the end of the poem who resembles to a large extent the one encountered at the beginning. This is not, however, the case. She has seemingly advanced, for the narrator concludes in the poem's final stanza:

Or est la malheureuse heureuse,
Et son malheur faict très heureux,
Puisqu'elle [est] parfaite amoureuse
De son trespas faict amoureux. (161-64)

¹⁰⁹ For Cottrell's eloquent discussion on the idea of Marguerite's poems as a linguistic coffin, see *Grammar of Silence*, pp. 213-19.

She has moved through death into life. Her words have taken on a life for themselves, and she is able to create a poem that, as Michèle Clément notes, recalls the linguistic acrobatics of the *grands rhétoriciens*. Linguistically speaking, she is more alive and has more of a voice than she did at the start. She has not succeeded in writing silence. On the contrary, she has given herself more authority than before.

Furthermore, the now happy *malheureuse* (or rather the one recounting her story) has created a world of pleasure and aesthetic attraction.¹¹⁰ The description of the landscape in this poem produces a sensation of pleasure that foreshadows that which Ullrich Langer has pointed out is found in later Renaissance poets Joachim Du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard. The delight this mountain offers the *malheureuse* vacillates and contradicts itself by continually changing form. As Langer states, “The poetry of landscape is not, however, simply a representation of variety, that is, of varied features of a coherent space, but puts forth a certain relationship of the poet and reader to variety” (13). He summarizes the idea of pleasure in the Renaissance as “doing freely what you do best” (16). In his conclusion, Langer notes that both Du Bellay and Ronsard represent pleasure as being able to move unimpeded through one’s surroundings (25).

I would argue that Marguerite de Navarre’s description of the mountain in this poem is also a source of enjoyment but that it finds itself in the variation between desire and death or activity and constraint rather than in the depiction of unrestrained movement. Consistent with Marguerite’s larger struggle with the relationship between her interior and exterior self, the landscape offers both a hiding place and a place where both Christ and the narrator track and find the *malheureuse*. This song is about an ascetic self-denial of instant pleasure that results in

¹¹⁰ See Langer for a discussion of pleasure as unconstrained movement in Renaissance literary aesthetics. As I will demonstrate, Marguerite’s poetics differ slightly from, but anticipates, those Langer finds present in Du Bellay’s and Ronsard’s poetry.

spiritual union and lasting enjoyment in the end. Thus, the poem vacillates between images of fertility and life and sterility and death on many levels. Also indicative of this type of variation is the emphasis on absence and presence. Nearly every stanza (especially in the poem's opening), presents a pulsating view of the mountain in dizzying alternation.

The protagonist finds her fulfillment, however, not in the freedom of her mobility but in embracing the suffering associated with death. Opposed to the jostling image of the wanderer at the start of the poem, line 120 presents a lover full of joy who "se veult arrester" and spend time with the object of her affections. This woman chooses banishment from the world and isolation in order to enjoy the Creator (125-44); she "ayme sa melencolie / Et ne refuse nul tourment" (121-22). Several stanzas just before the end of the poem demonstrate the extent to which she changes and the pleasure she finds in ceasing to move on her own initiative. Speaking of herself as the "uncomforted" one, she describes how Christ comforts her, changes what she saw as torments into pleasures and brings her back to life:

La desconfortée conforte
 Et luy rend plaisans ses ennuys,
 Voire et resucite la morte,
 Tourne en glorieux jours les nuits.

Il la remply d'amour nayfve,
 Il est sa force et son appuy;
 Par quoy moins en soy elle est vive,
 Plus vive s'en retourne en luy.

Or, puis doncques qu'il vit en elle,
 Elle ne peult craindre la mort,
 Mays en luy la trouve si belle
 Qu'elle l'atend comme ung seul port. (149-160)

The *malheureuse* who is thus transformed into lover is last seen waiting patiently for death. Having experienced and embraced it, she finds herself paradoxically more alive. Her happiness is a result of her patience and her immobility. This immobility is the final resolution of all of her moving about and is how she resolves her tendency to wander. Her relationship with God has made “plaisans” her “ennuys.” Instead of seeking to free herself from her seemingly paralyzed state, she turns her gaze upward away from her environment

Car eslevant au ciel la teste
 En contemplant leur [beasts and men] createur,
 De l'ouvraige elle faict la feste,
 Puisqu'il donne gloire au faicteur. (141-44)

Her surroundings are not her means of experiencing pleasure. Rather, it is the restful cessation of movement that results in a contemplative state of bliss. Later poets will refuse this rest and develop wandering and the accompanying variety as the actual source of pleasure, but Marguerite's journey and destination anticipates the joy that these later poets will expand.

The mountain landscape is what drives a consideration of the possible alternatives to her current existence. It is also a symbol of her spiritual state of anguish and an obstacle to overcome in her search for freedom and self-expression. Death and desire are linked in a dialectic cycle in which one inspires and silences the other. Marguerite's description of the environment is inspired

by her inner dialogue and points to the unheard by means of the seen and the unseen. Just as the *malheureuse* must navigate the treacherous peaks and crevices of the mountain, the writer must negotiate spiritual and authorial tension as she explores her “self.” In many of Marguerite’s *chansons* it is the “soul” who takes center stage. The narrator of the poem steps outside of herself to engage her soul in dialogue or to examine alternating idealized and realistic visions of her soul. Manipulating nature and making a map of her unseen psychological “geography” is another literary tool Marguerite uses to attempt to formulate a poetic vision of the fragmented self.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered Marguerite’s use of personified abstractions, internal dialogue, the narrativization of her soul and landscapes in the *Chansons spirituelles*. Each of these literary techniques represents an attempt to relate her inner experience to her experience in the world, and each tends to problematize our understanding of subjectivity in the poems because all fail to clearly indicate the subject of the meditations. Just as these uses of convention question the individuality and location of the self in relation to others, they also hint at the tension between the first-person subject in the poem and the self. For evangelicals, the self must be effaced and God, His Love and the resurrected Christ should occupy center stage. Yet it is the subject in these poems that lives to speak of her experiences and her resurrection, leaving open the question of the true nature of the self. The tension between death to self and desire to write is left unresolved. Understanding this complex relationship between desire and death in Marguerite’s spiritual poetry can also inform the reading of her prose to the extent that “[d]esire motivates the act of narration in the *Heptaméron*, but one must also take into account the relationship between desire and death in order to get a more complete understanding of narrative motivation in the short stories. Death is both the source and the end of desire” (Regosin 770-71).

Additionally, these unanswered questions will serve as the basis for later investigations by Montaigne, among others. In his introduction to the *Essais*, Alexandre Micha notes that Montaigne is “[...] un homme qui a voulu se déchiffrer pour élaborer une sagesse personnelle, à la fois par expérience, par la méditation et par la lecture” but who ends up describing a “univers intérieur, mouvant et inconsistant” (12, 16). The impossible dream of elaborating a stable self leads Montaigne to accept a vision of the self that he calls “*l’irrésolution*.” The same could be said of Marguerite’s poetic self. Ironically, the Queen of Navarre, though her *Heptaméron* was criticized by Montaigne as an example of why women should not engage in theology, in her *Chansons spirituelles* actually prefigures the same self-investigation that would come to characterize Montaigne’s writing.

Chapter Four – Violent Tensions

Introduction

Violence seems to have marked even the most mundane of Marguerite's relationships. For example, in the introduction I referred to an incident in Marguerite de Navarre's life in which her husband physically assaulted her and ordered her to refrain from speaking on matters of religion. Rarely the quiet, submissive wife, Marguerite continued to speak and to write about theology, and violent behavior also finds expression in her devotional poetry. In my first chapter on theological tensions, I mention the violence that accompanies Marguerite's turn toward God and ensuing silence before Him. Specifically, in *chanson* 30, "Mon ame n'ha plus autre esgard," the poet remarks near the end of the poem that Christ "kills" her soul (v. 38). The question of violence in society at the time Marguerite is composing the *Chansons spirituelles* occupies the minds of many of her predecessors and contemporaries. Atrocities, of course, increase in severity and frequency as the century progresses and clashes between Protestants and Catholics become bloodier during the kingdom's slide toward the Wars of Religion. In this chapter, I would like to take a closer look at violence within Marguerite's work as a whole and, specifically, at its role in the *Chansons spirituelles*. Beginning with a brief theoretical introduction to the aspects of violence that will concern my analysis and a survey of brutality in the writings of her contemporaries in order to situate the Queen of Navarre's poetry, I will follow the use of violence in her text to determine why Marguerite writes about it and what it produces in the life of those who speak in her poems. What is the nature of the relationship between violence and one's (in)ability to speak in the *Chansons*? Is there self-inflicted violence, or does it come from without? Or both? When does each occur? In examining these questions, the pitfall I hope to avoid is strictly categorizing violence as either entirely good or purely bad. In fact, this chapter

will enlarge our perspective on brutality in the sixteenth century as the sister of a king and struggling evangelical sees it. In her view, cruelty underscores a tenuous conception of the self as an expressive agent. As Marguerite negotiates the basic human dilemma between restraint and expression, violence paradoxically both constrains and provokes the poet.

It is clear that Marguerite de Navarre was actually a sort of renegade combatant in the struggle to promote certain evangelical ideas (especially concerning the role of human effort in salvation) but did not see violence in completely the same way as either her more contemporary models or as those who would come after her. Though much has been and is being written on the subject of violence, many are trying to fit Renaissance authors (and others) into models built by critics who lived 500 years later (Martin 7).¹¹¹ This chapter seeks to move beyond (or maybe better, behind) current theories of brutality and its role in the “fashioning” of the individual to consider what implications different representations of aggression have for Marguerite’s identity as she conceives of it rather than as a twenty-first century scholar would see it.

As pointed out in the introduction to this project, typical of the time she was writing, Marguerite approaches the question of identity and individuality from a variety of perspectives. For her and her Renaissance contemporaries, an individual is neither a completely separate, isolated entity nor simply part of a whole. As such, the idea of individuality is an unstable notion. Where there is instability, there is the possibility for contradictory assumptions about truth. For example, even the concept of self, as I have discussed elsewhere, is highly mutable during this period and can be seen as something to be embraced and proclaimed or as something to be masked, depending on the circumstances. As shifting perceptions of reality and the Queen’s

¹¹¹ Whether from a modern (e.g. Burckhardt) or post-modern (e.g. Greenblatt) perspective, the assumption is that Renaissance writers were not unlike ourselves.

relationship to it are faced with violent attack, the role of brutality similarly undergoes contortions and transformations. While seeming to align the speaker in a given poem with God's Word as the ultimate source of truth or to conform her to the image of Christ and give her a surer sense of identity, violence instead often produces a more anxious soul. The poet is less certain of her relationship to others and to God or the relationship between her inner and outer self. Thus while to some extent establishing boundaries based on power differences, violence in these poems also tends to call them into question. Episodes of assault, rape and murder (among others) become alternate permutations of interacting with the other and of negotiating the relation between interior and the exterior with which she (and her society at large) was so preoccupied.

Violence and Religion

Before opening the discussion of violence in the *Chansons spirituelles* in particular, it will be helpful to refer to the theoretical framework from which I am approaching the topic. As René Girard pointed out in *La Violence et le sacré*, violence has always been linked to religion through sacrifice. He concluded that violence in religious events springs from the idea of *méconnaissance* (431). According to Girard's analysis, violence is a means of demystifying the unknowable, but it also can call into question the entire order of religious and social hierarchies when confusion between proper and improper violence exists. Acceptable brutality would include the act of killing an innocent sacrificial victim for the purification of those making the sacrifice whereas inappropriate aggression against individuals or society in the form of assault, murder or rebellion is generally condemned in the religions Girard studies. The difference between the two kinds of brutality tends to become quite blurred at the actual moment of sacrifice. Within the context of immolation, Girard speaks of a "crise sacrificielle" when the

sacrificial object loses its purity because it takes upon itself the guilt of its presenter, and there is no difference between the object offered and the one doing the offering. This

crise sacrificielle [...] est perte de différence entre violence impure et violence purificatrice. Quand cette différence est perdue, il n'y a plus de purification possible et la violence impure, contagieuses, c'est-à-dire réciproque, se répand dans la communauté [...] La *crise sacrificielle* doit se définir comme une *crise de différences*, c'est-à-dire de l'ordre culturel dans son ensemble. Cet ordre culturel, en effet, n'est rien d'autre qu'un système organisé de différences; ce sont les écarts différentiels qui donnent aux individus leur 'identité', qui leur permet de se situer les uns par rapport aux autres. (76)

In addition to a crisis of identity that can potentially arise in the offering of a sacrifice, there is also an aspect of pleasure that arises from such immolation. Such masochistic behavior has been described by Gilles Deleuze as enabling the individual to surpass “the unconscious no less than individual consciousness” (53), and “masochism, for [Jacques] Lacan, is an investment in literary experience, which becomes, for the masochist, a way to disavow the symbolic order and become *ourselves*” (Sigler 97). David Sigler has highlighted the literary effects of these views of masochism and found that

[...]he masochist is desubjectivized — he or she emerges *qua* masochist only through a process of negation and objectification. But the masochist is not objectified merely because s/he has forfeited subjectivity: Lacan is specifically not proposing that *subjectivity* and *objectivity* are opposite or mutually exclusive positions. Rather, the masochistic arrangement conflates subjectivity and

objectivity by fashioning the subject into the very lost object that founds the arrival of that subject. Subjectivity and objectivity in the masochistic arrangement are thereby indistinguishable and indissoluble. (197)

In his reading of Lacan, Richard Boothby notes that the depiction of violence within literary works, what Lacan refers to as the death drive, “attempts to have its way with the imaginary ego, seeking to deconstruct its false unity” (177). Within the *Chansons spirituelles*, sacrifice and the associated pleasure in pain and suffering as a result of violence also indicate a particular view of the self as fluid and difficult to identify clearly. These moments reveal a paradox concerning Marguerite de Navarre’s view of the self because they delineate the subject’s relationship to the divine and to others around her clearly establishing boundaries between one’s self and the other while at the same time they undermine these established frontiers.

Turning now to consider Marguerite’s contemporary context of violence, that such brutality constitutes part of the religious, political, and even interpersonal polemic in sixteenth century France is well-documented (Ruff). For example, both Catholics and Protestants went to extremes to outdo one another in committing egregious acts of horror to exterminate, chastise, convert, persecute and retaliate against their compatriots. This tension surfaces in the work of one of Marguerite’s fellow evangelicals, Clément Marot. Known for his occasionally provocative writings, Marot tended to be found along the sidelines of the religious battles in France that were beginning to become more divisive. Of course, this is understandable given the nature of patronage and Marot’s dependence on the French crown and other nobles for his support. In an article that discusses Marot’s use of violence in his poetry, Florian Preisig notes the risk that Marot ran by associating himself with the fledgling religious outcasts as well as the alternating honor and dismay that characterizes the poet’s standing at court following the

vacillating need Francis I had for the Sorbonne's approval and his sister's evangelical influence. On the occasions when Marot references violence, he often, as expected, highlights the suffering of evangelicals at the hands of their Catholic persecutors (Preisig S33). Many of Marot's more violently polemical poems (again concerning the mistreatment of evangelicals at the hands of Catholics) were circulated clandestinely until 1533, when evangelicalism seemed to be gaining ground in France with the banishment of the Sorbonne's top persecutor, Noël Beda, and Marot would be feeling more liberty to express himself more openly (S35). For example, in his one of his *épîtres*, he references the vicious repression in the autumn of 1534 where non-conformists were burned at the stake (S39). The presence of brutality in these texts, however, is less an expression of personal suffering at the hands of another than a call to tolerance. Preisig summarizes that "[...] on pourrait dire, en forçant un peu, que l'engagement évangélique est un désengagement" and that in general, Marot's references to violence against evangelicals come from "moments de crise" and constitute less of a dominant theme than a reaction to particular circumstances (S42).

At almost the same time on the other side of the English Channel, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 – 1542), like Marot, was composing his version of some of the Psalms (published posthumously in 1549, the same year of Marguerite de Navarre's death).¹¹² Whereas the Marot's detached perspective on violence does not directly speak to the questions of individual identity but focuses on attacks by groups on groups, Wyatt portrays aggressive behavior as necessary for the spiritual development of the individual and for stabilizing one's relationship with God and others. As opposed to the tendencies of Marot's treatment of violence to focus on violence in society at large, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that Wyatt's "psalms enact not a communal

¹¹² H.A. Mason suggests that Wyatt composed his Psalms in 1536. For more publication information, see Mason, 202-09.

confession of sin, a guilt born by the entire community and purged by a shared ritual of absolution, but an unmistakably *personal* crisis of consciousness. It is the individual, cut off from his kinsmen and followers, who acknowledges his fault and suffers divine chastisement” (116-17). The acts of cruelty stabilize the notion of identity because, according to Greenblatt’s post-modern take on the emergence of the individual in the Renaissance, “[...] self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien, that what is produced in this encounter partakes both of the authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence that any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss” (9). There is a shift from calling on groups of people to be tolerant of other groups towards seeing spiritual violence as an integral force in the shaping of the individual. Greenblatt goes on to state that Wyatt’s verse tends to stress the inwardness of faith (115), but despite the intensely personal tone and nature of these paraphrases, they intertwine religious and political matters in order to confront what Wyatt perceived to be inappropriate behavior on the part of Henry VIII (121). Greenblatt concludes that the melding of the personal and the public, the interior and the exterior allows Wyatt’s lyrics to express “[...] competing modes of self-presentation, one a manipulation of appearances to achieve a desired end, the other a rendering in language, an exposure, of that which is hidden within” (156).

This difference between who one is on the inside and what others see points to an important development that gains ground in the Renaissance. Just after both Marot and Wyatt were writing, though there is some evidence that it began to appear in Renaissance writers as early as Petrarch and Valla, a growing moral imperative to make one’s feelings and convictions known begins to emerge in society (Martin 110). The idea of sincerity begins to change from meaning consistency between one’s inner self and the character of God, as had been the case

from the earliest days of Christian thought.¹¹³ John Jeffries Martin convincingly demonstrates that by the mid- to late-sixteenth century, sincerity had come to mean authenticity or consistency between what a person says to those on the outside and who she is on the inside as Protestants place a new emphasis on the personal expression of these inner emotions in order to avoid the appearance of hypocrisy between the internal and external (113). This idea of sincerity is key to understanding the role of violence in the *Chansons spirituelles* as I will discuss later.

Violence in Marguerite's Other Work

Concerning the Queen of Navarre's own treatment of violence, the more famous *Heptaméron* provides many examples to serve as an interesting point of departure. The 72 short stories that make up the unfinished and posthumously published response to Boccaccio's *Decaméron* are rife with allusions to and portrayals of brutality. Perhaps the tenth tale of the first day provides one of the more poignant examples, especially of masochism. In this story, Amadour attempts to seduce Floride who is engaged to another man she does not love. In order to be near the lady he cannot have, Amadour marries Floride's servant. Floride thinks that she is provoking Amadour's increasingly aggressive behavior. So, before Amadour's last visit, she grabs a rock and smashes her own face with it so that "la bouche, le nez et les oeilz en estoient tout difformez." (*Heptaméron* 77). By this means, Floride rids herself of the feeling of culpability of having attracted Amadour and rejects physical beauty in order to be able to pursue chastity and the purity of spiritual love within the context of a monastery after her lover departs and her husband dies.

¹¹³ See Martin for more information on the development of sincerity through the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century, especially pages 110-18.

Commenting on this story, Sabine Lardon concludes that the ultimate lesson Floride gives is that “la parole seule ne vaut rien si les actes ne l’accompagnent pas” (74). In the world of the *Heptaméron* at least, physical violence is an appropriate response to guilt and simultaneously verifies and results in one’s aspirations to pure love. Floride’s actions, first her disfigurement and then her choice to withdraw to the monastery, show that truth lies in action. Those who would be sincere must prove their genuineness by action, and more often than not, this means an act of violence either against oneself, as in the case of Floride, or against another person.

For example, Kathleen Llewellyn highlights the role of abuse directed toward women in the short stories and victims’ responses. Violence against women occurs for several reasons in the *Heptaméron*, and its use varies greatly from denouncing masculine violence to simply entertaining one’s conversant (117-18). Most poignantly, this aggressive behavior on the part of males takes the form of rape or attempted rape in a third of the tales. Women, often deprived of equal physical strength in the stories, must discover another force with which to respond to the brutality of men. Llewellyn finds that “[...] many women are able to keep their suitors at an appropriate distance through well-chosen words and skillful arguments” (120). One’s own voice becomes the best defense against the violent attacks of a male suitor because it confers a certain power on a woman. “She establishes herself as *je*, as *I*, as a speaking subject” who is no longer confined to the passive role of listening and acquiescing to the desires of her male counterpart (124).

Other critics argue that it is through silence in the face of male aggression that women in the *Heptaméron* obtain for themselves a certain level of power.¹¹⁴ Male violence springs up in the tales whenever desire is denied. A woman’s use of words to defend herself (such as is the

¹¹⁴ See for example Cottrell *Grammar*, Winn, and Glidden.

case in tales two, five and ten, for example) is a last-ditch effort to preserve her virtue, her chastity and typically her life. Speaking, like violence, is a particularly masculine act in the moral world of the *Heptaméron*, and, as Gary Ferguson points out in his article, “Paroles d’hommes, de femmes et de Dieu,” women who speak are not only described as men, they become purveyors of physical violence through their words as well. He summarizes that violence, whether linguistic or physical, is merely a means to push people toward the divine *Logos* and that “le discours de l’homme fonctionne, en fin de compte, comme un signe de sa limitation et de sa condition déchue” (210).

This idea of speech being a masculine domain finds further explanation in another of Marguerite’s violent stories. In order to promote female characters as worthy of following, the women in the tales “[...] must replace the typical female virtues of passivity and silence with an ability to act and speak” (Polachek 22). Considering the role of rape in the short stories, Dora Polachek investigates further how a woman’s response to sexual aggression serves the author’s narrative ambitions. She finds that rape signifies two distinct worlds – the physical and the spiritual – in the *Heptaméron* as it forces the reader to consider both the entertainment value of such episodes as well as the spiritual lessons they can teach (19). In the second novella that occupies the majority of Polachek’s analysis, “suffering becomes a didactic theatrical performance” (21). As initially the *dévisants* and eventually the readers of the tales observe the spectacle of rape that is detailed in this story, the violent attack serves to amuse them and to teach them. First, its temporal goal is to take the hearers minds off of their plight as they wait for flood waters to recede so they can make their way back to their stations in life. Similarly, readers who pick up a copy of the *Heptaméron* are, at least to some extent, seeking to evade their own realities through the fictional world the novellas describe. The rape scene does not only distract,

it also serves a pedagogical function because those who heard it and were reasonably “familiar with the Christian hagiographic tradition would find it easy to identify in this tale the standard tropes of the female saint’s life” (Polachek 21). The woman in this story is attacked by her assailant and makes a valiant effort to escape. The attacker subdues her, stabs her 25 times, rapes her and, escaping with impunity, leaves her for dead. She is found still alive, but loses her ability to speak and suffers wordlessly for some time until she finally dies under the watch of neighbors and priests with her integrity and faith still intact. Just as in the stories of martyrs, “only by suffering can the soul’s salvation be assured [...] and the martyr held up to others as a model for imitation” (22), she exemplifies faith and piety until her last breath.

Paradoxically, Polachek continues by portraying the woman’s rape and death as empowering and masculinizing. Similarly to Ferguson who found that women’s reactions to violence in the short stories allow them to participate in the male-dominated sphere of public discourse, through the brutality of this scene, this poor woman becomes a heroine and is granted access to the masculine world of combat. Having been pierced by her assailant’s sword, the lady’s “[...] bleeding body makes possible her inscription into the usually masculine topos of the ‘*miles Christi*,’ the soldier of Christ” (Polachek 22). Thus, what on one hand has the appearance of a horrible, senseless death that shocks even modern readers in terms of its grotesque violence turns out to be an avenue through which Marguerite elevates the position of women as an example to be imitated. On the other hand, the woman’s lifeless, mutilated body and unrequited death leaves divine justice “not only invisible, but questionable” (24). There is, in short, something extremely malleable, or restless in the way Marguerite de Navarre uses violence in her prose.

Violence in the *Chansons spirituelles*

Though some scholars have noted these potentially positive uses and results of violence, many of the studies regarding Marguerite de Navarre's employment of brutality in her prose tend to see it as something negative. Of course, there is much still to be said about this. Yet there is also a tendency on the part of scholars to ignore the rather positive aspects of the suffering that Marguerite the poet expresses in her devotional poetry. In my view, violence in her poetic expression attempts to connect speech with feeling. It is another tool through which she can bridge the gap between what she feels and what she experiences. In this way, the brutality in her poems implies that her sense of self depends largely on the interaction between pressures from the outside and the internal anguish she is feeling regarding uncertainty, despair, and a deep sense of guilt and highlights Marguerite's extraordinarily fluid religious beliefs that were characteristic of the century.

Furthermore, I will show below that Marguerite's desire to align the external with the internal, and the impossibility of realizing her desire, is perhaps best illustrated through her use of violence in the *Chansons spirituelles*. As I have demonstrated earlier, this longing for a space in which she could be herself and express herself freely is a common thread that runs through the poems. Whether she is looking for a way to deal with her brother's passing or for a way to communicate with God or a way to describe her rapture so others can understand what she is experiencing, this personal exposure is a very public experience. Mining the depths of her inner turmoil, Marguerite invites others to share in her experience. By converting the public, social violence that so characterized her age to a private, spiritual one and then re-publicizing it through the publication of her poems, she appropriately conveys her desire for sincerity through the purging of insincerity.

In addition to a personal experience of purity, the Queen also uses her poetry to encourage others to consider more fully their standing before God. The violence she portrays is physical in nature, but spiritual in application. In his correspondence with Marguerite, Guillaume Briçonnet writes: “Dégantez-vous, mais il convient d’agir par l’exemple, par l’instruction, et surtout par la propagation de la parole de Dieu en langue vernaculaire et dégagée de son commentaire scolastique, non par la violence que celle-ci soit verbale ou physique” (123, 128). He encourages her to fight, but he discourages the use of force in order to promote evangelical beliefs. Following Briçonnet’s advice, she uses God’s Word, as conveyed by her poetry, as her weapon of choice to attack what she perceives to be false notions of justification and salvation. These “unscriptural” views emerge not only when she considers what others believe, but through her writing, she discovers that she, too, has notions that do not line up with God’s ideals and must, therefore, be expunged. It is through these acts of violence that both Marguerite’s identity emerges and the author begins to understand how others see her. This is not a contradiction. Her understanding of the self as highly mutable allows for this sort of dialectic relationship between inner and outer, between the self and the other. Violence is just one avenue of exploring and expressing this complex interplay.

Violence and Sincerity

The first clear expression of violence in the *Chansons spirituelles* appears in the second song where, at the end of the poem, the speaker calls out to death:

O mort, qui le Frere as domté,
 Vien donc par ta grande bonté
 Transpercer la Sœur de ta lance.
 Mon dueil par toy soit surmonté;

Car quand j'ay bien le tout compté,
 Combatre te veux à outrance.

Vien doncques, ne retarde pas;
 Non, cours la poste à bien grands pas,
 Je t'envoye ma deffiance.

Puis que mon Frere est en tes laz,
 Prens moy, afin qu'un seul soulas

Donne à tous deux esjouyssance. (61-72)

She asks death to show her mercy by killing her and, thus, reunite the mourning sister with her dead brother. Most would not consider this request unusual or even irrational as an expression of the depth of grief the poet feels at the loss of her dearest and closest family member. In fact, Marguerite consistently expresses a desire to leave the terrestrial sufferings that characterize her life in order to either experience or re-experience fraternal or spiritual union, depending on the context in which she is writing. For example, later in the collection of songs, she writes that the loving gaze of Christ kills her soul and, in so doing, makes her more like Christ than she had ever been during her lifetime.¹¹⁵

The nature of the sister's death also points to the idea of immolation. She specifically asks death to "pierce" her through with its spear, evoking both the sacrifice of the lamb at Passover and the piercing of Christ upon the cross. She mentions that the benefits of her death include relieving her own suffering and bringing joy to her dead brother ("[...] qu'un seul soulas / Donne à tous deux esjouyssance"); as a sacrificial victim, her substitutionary death brings relief to others as well.

¹¹⁵ I discuss these lines (36-39) from chanson 30 in detail in my chapter on gender tensions.

As a religious event, sacrifice itself is a holy activity. The sacrificial victim – set apart, different, sanctified – is only holy because it dies unjustly. While sacrifice of the victim imposes itself on the believer as a means of justification, it also simultaneously implicates the believer in a murder of sorts. The blameless victim dies at the hands of the guilty culprit. A legitimate expression of faith and an illegitimate taking of an innocent life, sacrifice always has the goal of unity. Whether between God and the fallen or among the community of believers, the act brings together that which was separated. This theme of unity dominates this poem. The speaker laments the “dure absence” of her brother (21), regrets the fact that her “corps est banny / Du sien auquel il feut uny / Depuis le temps de nostre enfance” (37-38). The sister’s submission to death’s lance would reunite the separated siblings.

Herein lies one of the contradictions that is so fundamental to the nature of violence in the *Chansons*; it results in a splitting or doubling of the self. Curiously, the death that causes the pain is also the remedy to the sister’s suffering. The poem’s speaker clearly states that her torment results from the death of her brother of whom “[elle a] perdu l’heureuse presence” (24). The anxiety of separation can only be cured in the sister’s eyes by a reunification. However, her own death is the sole means of securing her desire. Violence here assuages the pain of the speaker’s existence and bodily separation from her loved one. This is not a call to mystical union with God – which I will demonstrate below is also accomplished through violence.

The lines quoted just above, however, read quite differently from the death she desires in the other songs that results in a mystical union between the speaker and Christ because they call on death to move violently against the speaker as opposed to asking Christ, as a merciful lover, to take her life. In this song, she is not only a sacrifice, but she challenges death to a bloody combat that it seems she hopes to lose. The dueling aspect clearly present in this part of the poem

(suggested by the “lance” “combatre” and the use of the phrase “Je t’envoie ma deffiance”)

allows for a definite tension in these lines that would lead a reader to believe that the speaker may not desire death as vehemently as she feigns when, in line 66, she states that she wants to fight death to the uttermost. The sister finds herself torn between longing for her brother’s presence and an unquenchable thirst to fight against the death that would grant this wish. In this way, the call to violence also reveals a degree of vulnerability on the speaker’s part and suggests that Marguerite the author is aware, at least to some extent, that her art in some sense kills its subject.

The sister in this poem also reveals anxiety about the sacrifice she proposes hinting at the uncertainty that surrounds the efficacy of her death to produce the desired results. This anxiousness recalls Girard’s *crise sacrificielle* noted earlier. Following his theory, the sacrifice here promises to restore order by reuniting sister and brother, yet the illegitimacy of such an offering calls into question the whole notion of justice, social order and, by extension, her means of stabilizing her own identity, since the innocent sister does not deserve death. That Marguerite is conscious of this crisis comes out clearly moments later in the poem when the resistant speaker desires to fight death “à outrance” despite her calls a few lines early for death to come run her through.

Marguerite problematizes violence when her speaker demands that death attack her and then reciprocates with a violent affront on her part. She desires to be with her brother which in turn requires an act of violence – at first by death then returned by the sister. This suggests a link between desire and violence. For modern readers, we have detached violence from desire; such a linking now signifies a deviation from contemporary acceptable social codes (i.e. sadism,

masochism, etc.). For Marguerite's speaker, the existence of a "normal" non-violent desire is impossible. Again returning to Girard:

Le fait que, dans la crise sacrificielle, le désir n'ait plus d'autre objet que la violence, et que, d'une manière ou d'une autre, la violence soit toujours mêlée au désir, ce fait énigmatique et écrasant ne reçoit aucune lumière supplémentaire, bien au contraire, si nous affirmons que l'homme est la proie d'un "instinct de violence". On sait aujourd'hui que les animaux sont individuellement pourvus de mécanismes régulateurs qui font que les combats ne vont presque jamais jusqu'à la mort du vaincu. A propos de tels mécanismes qui favorisent la perpétuation de l'espèce, il est légitime, sans doute, d'utiliser le mot instinct. Mais il est absurde, alors, de recourir à ce même mot pour désigner le fait que l'homme, lui, est privé de semblables mécanismes. (203)

This proves true in the poem currently under consideration when, despite clearly opposing death, the mourning sister still earnestly seeks it and finds in it "esjouyssance" at the end of the song.

She reiterates her distrust or uncertainty when she sends death her "deffiance" just before the concluding lines of the poem and is clearly hesitating between life (continuing in the body) and death (becoming a purely spiritual being). In part, of course, this trepidation would be expected. Marguerite is desiring her own death, and suicide is a mortal sin within Marguerite's religious context. The Church to which she belonged would say that taking one's own life puts one's soul in grave danger and would refuse Christian burial to those who would choose to end their suffering at their own hand. The Queen is dangerously close to the edge of heresy here when she speaks of longing for death in these terms. The idea that she could somehow not find

the union she yearns for and instead be separated forever from her brother (and from God) haunts her throughout the poem. Even in the first lines, she notes Despair's presence at her soul's door where she observes that "Desespoir est desjà à l'huys / Pour me jeter au fond du puits, / Où n'a d'en saillir apparence" (4-6). Despair is what can traditionally separate people from God. It can lead to taking one's own life. As a weapon of the devil, it corresponds here to the sister's internal state.¹¹⁶ There is a real danger that the speaker will slip into the pit of despair and be eternally separated from her brother and from God by taking her own life.

By using the image of being pierced by death's lance, however, she identifies herself with Christ and death is clearly marked as the evildoer in this situation. Like Christ who was pierced for her transgressions, this mourning sister seeks a specific kind of death that would leave her bearing similar stigmata to those of her Savior. Her bleeding body would be a perfect *imitatio Christi*. Not only would suffering this sort of violence assure her union with Christ and, therefore, her eternal home in heaven, it also solidifies her own agency. She places herself in a context usually reserved for men – that of combatant in a duel. Here, though, an aberration from the normal model occurs. For in the typical combat of this nature, the victor was assumed to be the innocent party, yet Marguerite claims to desire to lose this battle. Thus, she deconstructs the contemporary model of violence in her society, skirts the issue of suicide and simultaneously challenges prevailing notions of justice and innocence.

The melancholy that the sister displays at the beginning of the poem has now become her discourse of despair. It finds itself somewhere between opportunity and challenge – opportunity to express oneself and the challenge of doing so in an adequate manner. The speaker declares her inability to communicate properly the depth of her feeling when she says that "Seul pleurer est

¹¹⁶ The implications of this correspondence are discussed in my chapter on theological tensions.

[s]a contenance” (45).¹¹⁷ As discussed above, she finds herself later in the poem unable to submit fully (without a fight) to the death that she claims will bring joy to her and to her dead brother. She admits that she is emptied of all knowledge when she says that her “esprit aussi est puny, / Quand il se trouve desgarny / Du sien plein de toute science” (40-42), and earlier in the poem, she remarks that “L’on perd de luy la congnoissance” (18). This earlier line, of course, means that she no longer knows her brother (because he is physically removed from her through death), but it forges the link between knowledge and union with the brother, which the later lines make more explicit. The absence of her brother who was full of knowledge makes her less sure of who she is; her mind is punished, stripped of the identity she had while her brother was alive. Whether her denial of self-knowledge here indicates that she is facing a problem she cannot solve or that she is aware of a truth that she would rather not face (she can rejoin him only through a death that she does not truly desire), in her melancholic state she at once desires a violent death and resists the same through violence.

It is obvious that the loss of her brother has led the speaker to a sense of a loss of her “self” as well. Her body is banished in line 37, and her mind is punished as noted above in line 40. She feels emptied of herself and notes that her pain increases night and day (53-54) as she can think of nothing other than her mourning (48). This in turn prompts her to ask to die in order to rejoin the deceased. She does not wish, however, simply to pass peacefully from one life to the next. Her death must be a public, violent and open death in which she exposes herself. The duel that is called to reader’s mind is a public experience in which two parties exposed their interpersonal quarrel and invited spectators to watch them settle the dispute. Such a masochistic desire publicizes the one interior, private grief of the sister that goes beyond simple melancholy.

¹¹⁷ The importance of this line is developed in the section of my dissertation on sighing and moaning.

The subject's death-wish is further outed by the poem and its publication. In this way, being seen, being pierced so that her inside is known and seen from the outside and being destroyed through death are all interwoven. The poem demonstrates that violence is not a withdrawal from society as the speaker's desire for death would indicate at first glance but a way of negotiating her interaction with it.

Though she would fight "à outrance" against death, it would seem that God would not hear her cries for deliverance. Since this innocent victim's pleas would go unheeded, a reader would rightly see the inanimate corpse of the sister as a constant reminder of the injustice of death in this instance. In a society where justice was considered to be divinely administered, those who lose a duel should be guilty, but this poem in no way indicates any guilt on the part of the sister. That God did not or could not hear and answer the martyr's cry would be a logical conclusion for Marguerite's contemporary readers to draw. Thereby, in like manner to Polachek's analysis of the death of innocent woman in novella two of the *Heptaméron*, the author would call into question God's judgment as the ultimate arbiter. Such a position would indeed put Marguerite within the camp of heretics who question divine omniscience. It would be tempting then to see her as a willful individual choosing her own way in the world, revealing her internal struggles in line with Burckhardt's version of the emerging individual in the Renaissance. At the same time, one must not forget the context within which this request comes. Social, political and familial pressures would call on a dutiful sister to express such grief at the loss of her brother and king, and one could equally argue that this is an instance of "self-fashioning" wherein the sister's internal struggles are simply expressions of the workings of these different external influences. Neither model adequately addresses what Marguerite is expressing here since she is both submitting to the restraints of the world around her and

stubbornly resisting them. Violence in this instance foregrounds an imbricated, or even divided, self that is constantly aware of her own inwardness (i.e. what she is feeling and what she believes) and how she should face the circumstances in which she finds herself at the moment of her brother's death. The discursive reduction of her death wish is left unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, within the poem since the text does not indicate the end result of the matter and the reader is left wondering if the sister's desire was granted. We do know that for Marguerite, at least, her published poem did expose her grief to the world and continues to invite speculation as is evidenced by this project.

Throughout the *Chansons spirituelles* there are many instances in which brutality lays bare these issues of interiority central to Marguerite's writing and behind which she masks much of what she believes except to the few who would penetrate the depths of what she says. For example, she points to the double nature of violence when speaking of the pain the cross of Christ brings to the believer's life in the sixth song. In this poem, "un jeune Veneur demandoit / A une femme heureuse et sage" (1-2) where he can find the game he is hunting. The hunter seeks a literal deer, but the woman, attuned to spiritual things, turns the seeker's attention to the unseen. The almost comic failure of the hunter to understand the woman (at one point she states that the deer is standing right next to him, but he cannot see it) subtly opens a violent poetic that has many facets not only in this poem. The epistemological barriers created by the opacity of the messenger's words triggers the need for the truth to be split open through a piercing similar to that in the poem above. Only in this way can the inner realities of what the woman says be laid bare. For most of the poem, he continues to speak of an actual ungulate but finally "le Veneur entendit la game" (81), realizes the reality of the spiritual world and comes to Christ through the woman's patient instruction. Their dialogue serves as an opportunity for the wise woman to

expound upon several evangelical truths through the metaphor of hunting. Since the act of hunting is itself a violent pastime, the success of which requires the piercing through of its victim with arrow or spear at that time, and the poem immediately evokes a scene wherein prowess and brutality provide the basic building blocks, thereby elucidating the role of violence in the *Chansons*.

The teacher tells the hunter that that Christ's death (as opposed to the speaker's as in the poem considered above) brings pain or suffering to all who come into contact with it. Speaking of the quest for meaning in life, she says:

Ce que cherchez est dens le bois,
 Où ne va personne infidele;
 C'est l'aspre buysson de la Croix,
 Qui est chose au meschant cruelle.
 Les bons Veneurs la treuvent belle,
 Son tourment leur est vray plaisir;
 Or si vous aviez le desir
 D'oublier tout, pour cest honneur,
 Autre bien ne voudriez choisir :
 Mais vous estes mauvais chasseur. (21-30)

In line 24, the "meschant," or the one who would reject the evangelical message of salvation by grace through faith alone, finds the cross "cruelle." This is because it points to the fruitlessness of that individual's charitable works done to earn God's favor echoing Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23, who states that true believers "preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and

unto the Greeks foolishness.” The cruelty of the evangelical message would be that there is no good thing in the human heart and that no amount of effort or even desire (“Elle [the venison] ne se prend par courir, / Ne par vouloir d’homme du monde” 11-12) would be enough to redeem the sinner and change him from being a “mauvais chasseur.” Not even self-inflicted violence that results in death (“Ne pour tourment, ne pour mourir” 13) secures eternal security for the soul. Stated more explicitly by the voice of Christ Himself in the seventh song, such self-promotion (no matter how much pain it inflicts) leads to pride and to a scorning of Christ’s own suffering. He says,

Mais s’il se veult fier en son labeur et peine,
 Estimant mon tourment et ma passion vaine,
 Il congnoistra qu’Enfer, Mort, et Peché, et vice
 Vaincre ne pourra pas par sa propre justice :
 De pechés se verra chargé à sy grand somme
 Qu’à la fin pourra voir ce que peult sans moy l’Homme. (35-40)

This message aligns with the woman’s teaching in *chanson* six. Whereas Christ’s sufferings, His “tourment” in the seventh song, are the means of salvation for those who would trust Him. Highlighting the heteroglossic nature of violence in the *Chansons*, the messenger in song six also uses “tourment” to describe both human efforts to gain God’s grace and the result of the cross of Christ in the believer’s life. This points to the double valence of brutality and its inherent contradiction in Marguerite’s mind, her spirituality and her poetry.

Violence can be bad or good, and it is often difficult to distinguish between the two. In the first case, the torment that one goes through or even inflicts on oneself actually prevents the

seeker from discovering truth because he is so invested with himself and his merit that he cannot see that which is right in front of him, namely that only by trusting God in faith can one be assured of eternal salvation. The external performance of violence, in this instance, indicates spiritual blindness and is an obstacle to be overcome in one's pursuit of truth. The skin of violence covers an empty interior that is devoid of truth. This enclosure means to deceive and treacherously masquerade as something it is not. Through violence to the body, ascetics and others hope to procure God's favor and bring their physical frame into submission to God's will and conformity to the demands of God's law. Brutalizing oneself, then, does not indicate externally an internal reality here. Rather, Marguerite de Navarre paints it as a false façade seeming to demonstrate that one knows God, but in reality indicating that those who engage in such behavior are far from the truth. On the one hand, it dissimulates one's spiritual state because its practitioners believe they are revealing that they belong to God (or at least desire to), and on the other ends up revealing the opposite of that which those who treat their bodies with contempt hope to communicate.

By holding such deliberative and self-consciously assumed roles as at least suspect (and more likely as contemptuous) here, Marguerite seems to undermine a broadly-held view in the Renaissance of the performative nature of life. This outward self, so humble and abject in appearance turns out to be an act, and sadly, a performance that, in the evangelical's eyes, would keep people from drinking from "l'eau vive" (55). The desire to be seen suffering here is rejected as unauthentic. The hunter in this poem, for example, refuses to believe that all of his works are not enough to gain that prize he so desperately seeks. He ironically accuses the lady of speaking "par grand ignorance" (34) even though he is the one who does not realize that "le cerf est de vous [the hunter] près" (39). Violence as an expression of his strength remains his preferred

means of getting what he wants. He says as much in lines 35-36 when he contests: “Il faut que je destourne et *lance* / Le cerf, et que je coure après” (emphasis mine). The same spear that the mourning sister above asked death to pierce her with is the weapon of choice in the hunter’s hand. The truth as represented here by the stag must be opened and exposed. Thus, physically and lexically linking the two and, in essence, rejecting the notion that it is right and proper to dissimulate one’s beliefs in order to fulfill an expected role (humility in this case) for the purpose of earning God’s favor (and, by extension, the respect of others) to the degree that one’s self-presentation did not correspond to an internal reality.

This obviously differs from the interpretation of self-inflicted violence in the case of Floride in the tenth nouvelle in the *Heptaméron* discussed earlier. In the short story, Floride’s disfiguring act proved the sincerity of her heart. It revealed that which was true, whereas in the poem currently under consideration, the opposite would seem to be true. The difference lies in the way Marguerite envisions the two forms of violence. In Floride’s case, it is clear that she is committed to following God’s way and remaining chaste and pure. She is not relying on the outward aggression to earn her favor with God (or in that case anyone else), but it flows from a heart that is already pure in an effort to exemplify externally what has happened in her soul. As far as the hunter, however, any pain he would cause himself in order to earn God’s grace would be from a different source. It would not be directed by God, but it would come from his own impure desire to somehow promote his own goodness or worth in God’s eyes and in the eyes of others who would see his acts of self-aggression. This structure of good works, self-inflicted punishment and self-reliance stands in opposition to Floride’s humility and sincerity of heart.

That the hunter is oblivious to this spiritual side of the woman's message becomes obvious as the poem progresses. The young marksman begins his conversation with the woman by asking her

Si la chasse qu'il pretendoit
 Pourroit trouver, n'en quel Bocage;
 Et qu'il avoit bien bon courage
 De gagner ceste venaison
 Par douleur, merite, et Raison. (2-7)

Unable to decipher her meaning accurately, he seeks actual game that he hopes to consume. He plans to suffer for and earn the meat that would meet his need. He depends not only on his own physical efforts, but also on his ability to think logically and to reason. The "happy and wise" messenger's vocabulary is also full of allusions to hunting and to game. She, of course, is referring to Christ, but interpreting literally what she says, the hunter misunderstands until after his conversion in line 81. Though the interlocutors employ the same words, they are speaking a different language. The woman's goal is to metacommunicate the truth of faith in Christ, and she succeeds when "le Veneur [...] decouvrit la Poësie [...]et] abandonne" his folly and grasps the double meaning of the herald's language (81-84).

This polysemic nature of words is also true of violence within the poem itself, for the same word (*tourment*) that was used earlier to describe the ascetic's self-brutalization appears only a few lines later to characterize the benefits of Christ's death as it applies to believers (line 26, quoted above). In this line, the speaker has turned her attention away from describing the efforts of those who would trust their own works for their salvation and focuses on the "bons

Veneurs” who find Christ’s cross beautiful. As Michèle Clément points out her notes to Marguerite’s poems, this torment should be understood as that which the cross engenders in believers (206). Trusting in Christ’s merits, instead of one’s own, leads the woman to value violence differently in this stanza. Beginning with the premise that true believers have looked for and found redemptive grace through faith in Christ, the torment evoked here turns out to be a source of pleasure. Thus, it is not the violence itself that the woman finds detestable, but the state of the heart of the one engaging in it. No longer an outward expression meant to mask true interior motives or impurities, pain here identifies the penitent one with her Lord. In this paradigm, one’s true spiritual standing is related from the inner to the outer through violence. The source of this brutality makes all the difference. In the former case, it is man-made; in the latter, God divinely reveals it in the life of the believer.

Surprisingly, then, a few lines later the speaker does leave the door open for the possibility of an earthly paradise when she speaking to the still unconverted hunter she says, “[...] de Terre et Cieux / Serez Seigneur et possesseur, / Si la Foy vous ouvre les yeux” (57-59). For the person of faith, the Earth is still to be enjoyed. Just as God commanded Adam to “subdue” the earth in Genesis 1:28, the evangelical messenger does not enjoin the believer from ruling over the Earth. It is not physical existence that is condemned here, but a misplaced focus on that which is terrestrial. Similarly, the poem treats violence itself not with contempt, but saves its harshest criticisms for those who would use exterior violence to hide their insincere hearts.

The sincerity either dissimulated or confirmed by violence in this poem becomes a major theme throughout the *Chansons spirituelles* and is closely related to the anxiety of separation that also dominates the poems because it is alongside, and often through, the right kind of suffering that Marguerite expresses her desire to be united with another. The kind of transparency that she

highlights here divulges the fact that one can never be too certain of another's standing by looking merely on the external evidence of salvation. Accompanying this uncertainty about others is a self-doubt as to one's own relationship with God, for in this poem, it is only by removing oneself from society and ultimately the world that one could confirm her salvation and experience unity with Christ.

As the poem continues, for example, the woman urges the hunter to reject the world and "oublier tout" (28). After the young man sees the error of his ways and converts to the woman's way of thinking, he takes her place as teacher and herald of this doctrine, and he proclaims:

Venez, Veneurs, venez, venez
 A la salutare curée;
 A laisser le monde apprenez,
 Qui est de sy courte durée;
 Car charité immesurée
 De son Tout vous fait le present,
 Par lequel Rien est fait plaisant,
 Remply de divine liqueur;
 De moy, je m'y rens à present
 Pour n'estre plus mauvais chasseur. (101-10)

Encouraging those who would know true contentment and escape the inner turmoil that attends to trying to earn one's salvation, he calls on his listeners to abandon the world, its pursuits and its façade of falseness. He opposes in particular courtly life to this idea of pursuing that which has no lasting value, identifying his audience as "Empereurs, Roys, Princes, Seigneurs" in the

preceding stanza (91). Specifically naming courtiers would allow one to assume reasonably that the newly converted hunter believes these people had particular difficulty with this aspect of following Christ. Being a hunter himself, he is of the nobility. Who better to know the impossibility of being able to live a life united to Christ within the context of the court? By also identifying his noble instructees as “Piqueurs, Chasseurs, Veneurs” (93), he returns to the motif of hunting and connects the notion of violence to the purification of one’s soul and purging of the world’s influence. Hunting for Christ and being hunted by the same are two sides of the same complex mystical relationship this poem points toward. In essence, violence performed on oneself cannot produce the sort of sincerity and purity first the woman and then the hunter argue in favor of, but divinely induced aggression does seem to be the necessary means and expression of disassociation from the world and unification with Christ.

Marguerite evidences this idea more clearly in the eighth song when its speaker declares that for the faith-filled believer, “L’arbre de Croix, de peine, et mort, / Que tant avoit eu en horreur, / Maintenant c’est le reconfort” (38-40). The violence that would destabilize the individual in this song turns out to be a source of comfort because of its simultaneous ability to dissolve the connections to the world (make the speaker more autonomous) and to fuse her to Christ (melding her into the “Tout”). While the speaker praises God for the “nouvelle joye” she experiences thanks to God’s salvation, in the midst of her elation, her attention turns to the cross and the pain and death that characterizes it. Instead of reining in her effervescent song, the violence causes her to sing only more loudly and more forcefully because it reminds her that Christ’s death has put the believer “dens le Puissant” (53); it has separated her from the world and united her to Christ.

Violence and Identity

This use of violence in these poems gives rise to a more bounded sense of identity in Marguerite's poetry because it juxtaposes two antithetical ideas regarding the self circulating during the Renaissance. Specifically, Marguerite calls into question the idea that one should subordinate honesty to decorum. The poems condemn and detest playing a role – religious, political or personal – in order to cast oneself as something one is not. On the contrary, the poems considered above would point the reader to believe that Marguerite advises that one should always be honest and forthcoming, always presenting the truth about one's identity despite the possible repercussions. Yet, as the Queen develops these ideas in later poems, the distinction between dissimulation as bad and sincerity as good begins to blur.¹¹⁸ The tension between the two, as demonstrated by the use of violence in other poems, leads to a dynamic understanding of the human self as it relates to suffering. Depending on the circumstances they find themselves in, the speakers in Marguerite's poems choose between concealment and faithful self-representation in the face of violence. John Jefferies Martin points to a similar, but secular concern among late-sixteenth century humanists:

[...] the very existence of such a duality (between prudence and sincerity) in the discourse of the late Renaissance is itself revealing. It provided a kind of ethical field upon which men and women in this period negotiated the demands of everyday life, whether in the court or in the city. And over time, it sharpened contemporary notions of the self as a unique, complex entity. (118)

I believe that Marguerite struggles in a like fashion in the spiritualized context of the *Chansons spirituelles*, and that the resulting notion of the porous self as it is shaped by and reacts to violence does not fit perfectly into the popular view of Renaissance individuals as either overly

¹¹⁸ This is also very true in the *Heptaméron*.

concerned with their own sense of inwardness or the result of purely external pressures that fashioned them in their specific roles constantly fighting against cultural forces which denied them true self-expression.

Violence in these songs allows Marguerite to express a yearning for annihilation in Christ and to create an individual self that subverts her avowed rejection of matter and provides another way for her to interact with the Divine Other as well as those in her environment. In the poems I have looked at already, brutality can be a farce, performed on oneself to promote a false association with Christ. It is also clear that in these poems Marguerite reenacts and textually incarnates the sufferings of Christ, then projects them on to the poems' speakers in a masochistic desire for pain in order for their identification with Christ to be seen. In song 26 ("Dieu, de son celeste creneau"), Christ Himself carries out this same marking of His faithful. He says

Mes Brebis par nom je congnois,
 Qui tresbien entendent ma voix,
 Merchées les ay de ma Croix,
 Douleur et peine :
 Et quand il me plaist quelquefois
 J'en prens la laine. (7-12)

Similarly to what has been observed above, the violence the Christ suffers is what sets apart (or marks, "merchées" = "marquées") those who are able to hear and understand what Christ is saying to them. Here, however, the fact that He takes their wool when it pleases Him signals a shift in the expression of violence considered earlier, for Christ performs the violence on His followers in order to denude and expose them.

This unusual masochistic fantasy of Christ stripping believers requires a slight detour to describe what is meant by both “masochism” and “fantasy.” In the case of the latter, I refer to Maria Torok’s clinical definition of fantasy: “Fantasy constitutes a positive attempt to transcend the pure affect and arrive at a representation of it, an attempt in which the analyst is invited to participate.... Fantasy is expressive of an attempt at working through the problem and is combined with a desire for collaboration” (36). As to the former, it is Christ who is speaking of His treatment of His followers, but there is no indication that the believer objects to this denuding because it is accompanied by a reclothing that demonstrates the disciple’s affiliation with her master in the eyes of those who would observe the shearing. The pleasure the believer experiences as a result of this pain is expressed as a “bien grand’joye” (30), as triumphant union with Christ (37-42) and as fellowship with God the Father (47-48). The everyday sufferings for Christ’s sake are no longer just endured but enjoyed.

The doubling in the life of the believer this image produces is clearly seen in the next stanza. Christ continues to speak and says that He removes their covering (“habillement”) in order to dress them more warmly and provide a more suitable “vestment” (13-18). The violence that marks the Christian and establishes her identity as belonging to Christ is accompanied by another transformation and entails self-effacement, which Marguerite evokes in the image of a sheep being shorn. In fact, the brutality intensifies later in the poem when Christ sees his lambs skinned and flayed before their deaths in line 37 (“Mortes je les voy escorcher”) and cut into pieces in line 39 (“destrancher”).¹¹⁹ According to Christ the removal of their flesh and hacking up of their bodies takes place “Pour les reünir en ma chair” (38). The mystical union between Christ

¹¹⁹ It is also possible to read this line as meaning that Christ cuts his followers off from the world, which would be consistent with the poem but still involve violence. Cotgrave does give “cut off, hewed from, hacked asunder, chopping in peeces” as possible translations for *destrancher*.

and His Body being evoked is clearly established in many of Marguerite's other poems and writings.¹²⁰ What is important to note here is that it is through violence (and fairly brutal violence) that the believer is both established as an individual and merged with Christ.

The details of flaying and bodily dissolution here effectively provoke questions concerning individual autonomy and identity. The removal of the skin would point to the ideal of sincerity mentioned earlier. In this purest form, what is seen on the outside is actually and in fact the inside, and there is perfect harmony between interior and exterior. Christ's words reduce the believer to her flesh and then destroy even that. He reminds her of the boundaries of her body and the limits even of her personal autonomy. Admiring the sufferings of the follower of Christ, the reader would be compelled to affirm the self by offering her own body for similar destruction. At the same time, if she truly found herself in such circumstances, she would be undone. Emptied of the sense of self that provoked her to identify with the victim of Christ's aggression, she would merge with Christ in mystical union as the boundaries of her body that had demarked the self are undone.

The torture of the believer is transformed to a visual spectacle for Christ.. The believer silently accepts being sheared, skinned and cut into pieces because she is being watched by Christ and by the world around her. The genuineness of her interior experience of union with God is exposed to the exterior through the violence Christ enacts and allows to be enacted upon her. In fact, the resulting pleasure from this experience is precisely what makes it masochistic. Only through the pathway of suffering can the believer be led to the Father or experience the "bien grand'joye" Christ promises those whom He carries in line 30 of the poem. Opposed to the

¹²⁰ See Cottrell, Sommers, Thysell, for example.

violence that Christ suffered at the hands of the world in order to make a sinner into one of His children, this violence is effected upon the flock while the Good Shepherd watches.

Amour les me fait regarder
 D'un œil de frere;
 Pour les conduire sans tarder,
 A Dieu mon Pere. (46-48)

Then, abruptly the poem undergoes a paradigmatic shift when Christ suddenly ceases from describing the sheep and directly addresses the under shepherds, or pastors. He reminds the pastors, whom He refers to as his “bons serviteurs” (49), that they should be lovers of God’s simple and abundant Word as they care for their flock. By so doing, He reminds the reader that the believers are still part of this present world. The apparent amputation that was performed earlier that served to sever the believers from their flesh and from the world has not yet accomplished its final goal, for these pastors are exhorted to preach and teach the Scriptures to those who are still alive and in the world. The brutal dismemberment denies with increasing fervency a reality consisting of a corporeal presence, but the last lines of the poem refuse to admit that reality by insisting on the duties of pastors to teach believers who are still very much physically existing.

Ironically, it is only through living that one can have the right relationship with death, thus the need for violence in the life of the Christian to remind her constantly of the transitivity of her physical existence. Marguerite’s attitude toward violence and its role in the formation of the self is ambiguous then. While establishing the need to embrace the suffering of death and the subsequent annihilation of the believer, the Queen of Navarre simultaneously insists on the

continued physical existence of the same because only by loving both death and life can one enjoy the suffering inherent in life. As Robert Cottrell states, “unlike those medieval mystics who utterly despise the flesh, she is conscious of the fact that the body is the only vehicle through which God can speak to man and reveal His presence” (*Grammar* 106). A few songs after the one analyzed previously (Chanson 29, “Pour estre bien vray Chrestien”), Marguerite describes what she believes one must renounce in order to please God and move toward Christlikeness. Among the normal signs of penance of giving up worldly honor, pleasure, riches, lust and other terrestrial affections, she writes in the last stanza that one must also conquer death

En la [death] trouvant plaisante et belle,
 Voire et l’aymer d’aussi bon cœur,
 Que l’on fait la vie mortelle;
 S’esjouyr en melancolie,
 Et tourment, dont la Chair se deult,
 Aymer la mort comme la vie;
 Il ne fait pas le tour qui veult. (18-24)

The only correct way to embrace death is not to die, but to go on living in such a way that suffering (the word “tourment” resurfaces) becomes pleasurable because the flesh is opposed to it. Melancholy and pain become one of the avenues through which the believer can expose her inner self and force into the open the change that Christ has wrought in her life. Violence becomes a necessary outcome of the inner transformation of the soul. It is not a suicidal wish that characterizes the repeated desire for a violent or painful death in the *Chansons spirituelles* as much as evidence of self-revelation. Furthermore, it is no longer at the hand of Christ that the disciple suffers. The source of the suffering here is not mentioned. This moral masochism, as

Freud stated it, is characterized by the possible anonymity of the source of suffering. He claimed, “All other masochistic sufferings carry with them the condition that they shall emanate from the loved person and shall be endured at his command. This restriction has been dropped in moral masochism. The suffering itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone who is loved or by someone who is indifferent is of no importance. It may even be caused by impersonal powers or by circumstances” (165).

Just as others have pointed out in the works of other Protestant authors, Marguerite’s “[...] efforts [at modeling or fashioning herself] proceeded in the face of a fundamental wish to escape the burden of selfhood” (Marshall 30). While not denying Stephen Greenblatt’s argument that cancellation of identity is the result of self-revelation in early modern works when he says that “self-fashioning always involves [...] some loss of self” (9), I would argue that the opposite is also true in Marguerite’s poetry. The loss of self as experienced through violent attack becomes the means of expressing this same self. It is another permutation of the tenuous relationship between the exterior and the interior that so characterizes the era in which she writes. If she is wishing to negate, annihilate or otherwise erase herself from the text, she does so in a way that pulls against her stated desire. This unresolved tension concerning violence reminds the reader that Marguerite sees the self as vast and unknowable and that one’s interior experience relates in many complex and varying ways to the outside world.

The use of “esjouyr” would also point to the particularly feminine ecstatic suffering that violence engenders. Corresponding to Freud’s idea of female masochism, this work and the others studied in this chapter “place the subject in a characteristically female situation” (162). The humiliated sheep being shorn, the penetration of the lance into the believer’s body, the assumption of feminine virtues in order to follow Christ all identify such “characteristically

female situation[s]” directly within the poems themselves. In presenting her speaker, often female, as an object of instruction, a case-study to be analyzed and emulated (as in the case of the women in the *Heptaméron*, as pointed out above, and in the *Chansons spirituelles*),¹²¹ Marguerite encourages her readers to see these acts of violence as potentially exciting because they move the victim toward a state of blissful union with Christ. The torment that the believer goes through occasions an unsettling of the established self as it merges with Christ, a religious *jouissance*. Similarly to female martyrs in Foxe, for example, these women would be an example of the possibilities of pleasure in pain. Concerning later English Protestant works which depicted similar violence against women in particular, Cynthia Marshall notes that

[f]or female audience members, accustomed as women traditionally were to taking the male experience as universal, images of masculine suffering would have been more likely to promote imaginative self-shattering, while the spectacle of feminine dissolution might have been more likely to register as heroic. [...W]omen may well have taken pride and subversive pleasure in the heroic deeds performed by female characters, even when the deeds led to punishment or self-destruction. (43)

The *jouissance* that Marguerite evokes in the lines quoted just above point to a similar intertwining of violence and pleasure that paradoxically confirms the boundaries of the self and effaces the same. In this poem, the speaker both actively vanquishes death and passively submits to it by finding it both beautiful and pleasurable.

Conclusion

¹²¹ See my chapters on authority and on women for an example of this notion in the *Chansons spirituelles*.

This dual violence in the *Chansons spirituelles* fulfills many functions. Just as in her other religious works, divine violence moves the believer to Christlikeness, and Marguerite de Navarre's spiritual songs evoke the necessity of suffering in the lives of the faithful. However, the subtle questions concerning provenance are also key to understanding the textual representation of violence and its function in the formation of the self. The Queen also uses violence to instruct and to warn of the dangers of trusting in one's own merits to earn salvation or God's favor, as she does in the *Heptaméron*. Additionally, these admonitions are directed towards those who would use external self-aggression to feign a relationship with God that is not truly there. Though the violence is very real, its source is corrupt and cannot produce the fruit of salvation. Rather than marking its practitioner as a genuine child of God, it reveals him to be self-deceived, for in Marguerite's paradigm, only the sufferings of Christ can appease God and provide salvation. Once a person has received this gift by faith, however, the inner transformation she undergoes expresses itself through divinely initiated suffering. Additionally, the appeal of violence infuses the songs with meaning, and I have argued that the emergent notions of the self are related to the representation of the exposure of the interior through violence in the form of piercing and flaying. The autonomy experienced through the textual expression of violence allows us to mark an accompanying sense of self-expression in Marguerite's poetry. The description and enactment of violence within the songs simultaneously establishes and threatens the spiritual union that binds Marguerite to God. According to Marguerite, Christ marks His own through brutality, pain and torment and seeks to efface their self and make evident the loss of self that occurs at the moment of union with Him. The violence that would seem to fashion the believer in Christ's image also works as a tool through which He denudes her and she can connect a new inner reality to her external surroundings and

experiences, ever expanding and never simplifying Marguerite's conception of the self by simultaneously confirming her sincerity, constraining her identity in Christ and liberating the expression of herself.

Conclusion

This study has examined Marguerite de Navarre's *Chansons spirituelles* in the context of sixteenth-century ideas concerning the self and self-expression. In essence, I have found that Marguerite conceptualizes the self as a series of relationships between the interior and the exterior, who one is on the inside and the image or projection of that entity on the outside. To help establish a framework within which to develop these ideas, I have focused on theological, gender, and poetic tensions at play throughout the compilation of songs. These tensions provide opportunities to examine what Marguerite desired to communicate about her understanding of the emerging concept of the individual in Renaissance France. Additionally, these poems demonstrate how the author's portrayal and valuation of violence both clarifies and obscures the relationship between internal and external that is fundamental to proper interpretation of the songs and much of early modern French literature.

Like those before me who have looked at other aspects of these songs and the Queen's larger corpus of devotional literature, I have found that Marguerite offers a simultaneous respect for tradition and a desire for innovation that fluctuates throughout her poetry. She approaches questions of the self in the same way. Often, she presents a conservative view of the self as part of a larger community, for example. At other times, the individual is seen as severed from others or wandering across deserted landscapes, unsure of who she is or what she is to become. She neither denies nor completely affirms either modern or post-modern concerns regarding the self. Her treatment of violence is also equivocal in that it can be used for dissimulating or for confirming one's true identity. She does not desire a life free from violence but its proper and effectual use in the life of the believer.

This balanced approach also pervades her treatment of religious principles, such as that of *sola scriptura*, that were being debated in the Queen's circles. I have argued that vocalization in her poetry points to opposing relationships to God (as penitent sinner, as adoring worshiper, or as belligerent rebel) and that these permutations can all be expressed with the same verbs of sighing, murmuring, and other voiced, but wordless, speech. These reveal a constant struggle with the idea of Biblical authority by calling into question whose voice has the right to speak, when and how. Of course, the bibliocentrality of Marguerite's poetry is undeniable, yet the author finds herself unable to efface herself completely from the text. The poems reveal both God's and Marguerite's presence to the reader harkening toward more modern apprehensions surrounding the relationship between author and text.

Though these poems are primarily religious, I have not limited myself to purely metaphysical concerns. The self, as I noted above, is construed as multi-faceted. Thus, while there is an esoteric, spiritual nature to one's identity as Marguerite understood it, there is also a worldly, secular aspect that is also always present within the texts and within the individual speakers in the poems. That is why I believe it is appropriate to have evaluated the poems from a feminist perspective. Here, too, Marguerite presents a gendered self that is essentially fluid. Speakers in her poems androgynously switch between masculine and feminine voices, and it is often difficult to tell in a given poem whether the speaker is male or female. Though I make the case for a moderated version of feminism in the Queen's works, it is evident that she was not afraid to emphasize and extol what her society termed more feminine virtues, laying the groundwork for the expansion of what it means to be a woman.

The fluidity of the self also appears in Marguerite's application and refashioning of poetic and rhetorical norms at the time she was writing. I have examined personified

abstractions, internal dialogue, the narrativization of her soul and landscapes in the *Chansons spirituelles* to evaluate the extent to which Marguerite used these literary techniques to disambiguate and to obscure the nature of the relationship between inner and outer. Her manipulation in these three areas problematizes our understanding of subjectivity in the poems because they result in a blurring between the literary subject and object. Furthermore, the alternating use of these rhetorical devices point to the Queen's own struggle with individuality and location of the self in relation to others, and this tension is often left unresolved. The blurring between the literary persona and the self was to be taken up by later writers, and it would be interesting to explore the adaptations and mutations this notion undergoes in the years following Marguerite's presentation of it.

The last area of tension considered was the use of violence in the songs. Marguerite provides admonishment through her portrayal of brutality. As with the other areas, violence proved to possess a bivalent nature in the Queen's spiritual and emotional economy. It can be used to project an untrue image of the self to others; its practitioners claiming to be followers of God because of the masochism they engage in. They would use self-inflicted pain to promote themselves in others' (human and divine) eyes. However, as Marguerite portrays it, the genuine believer can see through this mirage and recognize the deceit because she has been made aware of and accepted by faith alone the Truth that only the torment Christ endured can atone for one's sin. This does not indicate, however, that violence is only a means for deceiving; it can also serve as the means for communicating one's conversion.

The inward regeneration Marguerite's speakers undergo expresses itself outwardly through divinely initiated suffering. According to the author, Christ marks His own through spiritual "shearing" that exposes them and evidences the effacement of the individual that occurs

at the moment of union with Him. The violence that would seem to fashion the believer in Christ's image, however, also works as a tool through which He denudes her and she can connect a new inner reality to her external surroundings and experiences, ever expanding and never simplifying Marguerite's conception of the self by simultaneously confirming her sincerity, constraining her identity in Christ and liberating the expression of herself.

Having completed this survey of the *Chansons spirituelles* and their correspondence to Marguerite's view of the self, there are many questions that persist despite the answers to others that have been proffered. For example, since the focus of this study has been the *Chansons spirituelles*, I have not considered in depth these permutations of the self in the context of the Queen's *Heptaméron* or her plays. There still remains room for discussion on the appearance of these notions of individualism in the more worldly context of the short stories and her theater, and an application of the above versions of the self to such a setting would, I am sure, prove fruitful. I have also tangentially treated but a few domains – theology, gender, rhetoric and violence – wherein Marguerite offers glimpses of her understanding of the relationship between interior and exterior to her readers. For example, studying the function of music and its correspondence or dissonance with the poems' words could also elucidate and enlarge not only understanding of the text but also provide another possible avenue through which this sixteenth-century writer both expressed and concealed herself.

As far as our understanding of the self as those in the Renaissance perceived it, this project has evidenced that it was (and, perhaps, remains) a complex issue that defies quick categorization. The nature of identity in early modern France continues to invite further investigation precisely because there remain such a diversity of available expressions of the human desire to establish congruence between the inward person and the exterior presentation of

the self. Obviously concerned with the integrity of such self-expression and aware of the important didactic value of her songs, Marguerite calls upon her readers – sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly – to mimic her, or at least her desire for union with Christ. She made a significant contribution to the development of the idea of the individual in the Renaissance by offering several modifications of the unified self in this compilation of shorter poems. Marguerite's prose, longer devotional poetry and theater need to be considered to verify if these notions of the self remain consistent and before declaring the subject fully scrutinized.

By clarifying the importance of such philosophical and metaphysical ideas in the *Chansons spirituelles*, I have also demonstrated that one cannot simply say that Marguerite de Navarre was “silent” in the purest sense of the word. Instead, she presents in this work a highly nuanced and sophisticated voice that appears, disappears and reappears in some of the most surprising places and at some of the most unexpected moments. The intriguing effect of this constantly self-modifying persona on readers and on those who would adapt her songs for use in public worship services would make for a rich field of inquiry as well. How the Queen manipulates language to both hide and reveal herself and the way her language is, in turn, appropriated by others in order to encourage or discourage sincerity would be well-served by the preceding findings regarding the instability of the self in the songs across the above-referenced domains.

Despite the remaining possibilities for investigation, these pages do provide a valuable optic through which to evaluate our current understanding of the Renaissance view of the individual. It most importantly clarifies some previous misinterpretations of individualism as either purely self-made or entirely the result of impersonal social forces at work to fashion the self. The overarching principle this work seeks to convey is that the self in early modern France

was not a stable entity, and it was capable of altering and assimilating various and sometimes contradictory qualities as differing purposes suited it. The self as Marguerite presents it is, in many ways, not that different from the views of those around her; many of the songs clearly align Marguerite with the religious and social hierarchy of her day. It is clear, for example, that she highly values many traditional religious interpretations of concepts such as sin and justification. She provides her own perspective on these ideas, however, and makes them quite subversive in certain contexts. The Queen is not only aware of different forces in these domains, but she also actively absorbs them, modifies them and remakes them in her own image. Thus, she not only produces a religiously-charged work, but one that speaks to many of the questions in secular domains as well.

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